

Introduction

1. A few weeks ago we saw how the early Church devoted themselves to four things, one of which was fellowship:
 - a. As we discussed then, we often think of fellowship simply as a synonym for hanging out together
 - b. But, Biblical fellowship is more than this
 - c. The Greek word, *koinonia*, refers to having a relationship with others based on participating or sharing in common things
 - d. It implies close association in shared interests and was used to describe the closest of human relationships
2. We've already seen what this *koinonia* looked like in the early Church in Acts 2:42-47:
 - a. They were constantly sharing with one another to meet each other's needs
 - b. Some sold property and donated the proceeds
 - c. They met daily to share their meals together
3. We see something similar in today's passage but with a twist:
 - a. Luke begins by once again describing the unity and fellowship shared by believers in the early church
 - b. However, he then goes on to describe the first real threat to that fellowship
 - c. So, our passage today is one of contrast:
 - 1) On the one hand, we see the amazing self-sacrificing generosity of many whose only goal is to help their fellow believers
 - 2) On the other hand, we see the sinful, self-aggrandizing actions of two individuals whose only goal is to help themselves

A. The fellowship of the early Church was evidenced by their tremendous generosity and concern for one another (READ 4:32-37)

1. This is the second time Luke refers to the amazing unity and fellowship experienced by the early Church—the first was in Acts 2:42-47 which we studied a few weeks ago
2. He repeats many of the same things here that he revealed in Acts 2:
 - a. He writes of their unity referring to them here as being “**of one heart and soul**” and in Acts 2:46 as being of “**one mind**”
 - b. He writes of the signs and wonders being performed through the Apostles as they preached about the resurrection of Jesus, and the “**awe**” (2:43) and “**grace**” it inspired among believers
 - c. However, the major emphasis in both passages is on the mutual sharing and caring that took place within the Church:
 - 1) Both passages stress that no one considered what they owned to belong purely to themselves, but “**all things were common property to them**” (32)
 - 2) Both passages mention how believers sold property and possessions and shared with anyone who had need to the point that “**there was not a needy person among them**” (34)

3. Luke even provides us with an example in a man named Joseph, who we know as Barnabas (READ 36-37)
4. Some notes about the generosity of the early Church:
 - a. These passages are descriptive, not prescriptive, meaning they tell us what the early Church did; they don't command us to sell everything we own and give it to the Church
 - b. Very few people during the first century owned property or their own home:
 - 1) It was generally found only in the middle to upper class which made up less than 15 to 20 percent of the population so those are likely the ones
 - 2) So, those Luke refers to as selling property likely refers to those in the middle and upper class
 - 3) However, this doesn't mean the rest were not involved with sharing what they could because he states explicitly that **"not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own"** (32)
 - c. The language and tenses used here imply the selling of property and possessions was not something done all at once but rather an ongoing process; it likely refers to selling and giving to meet needs as they arose among members of the Church family
5. Takeaway:
 - a. Generosity within the Church is a critical component to maintaining and promoting fellowship—koinonia—within the body of Christ
 - b. There are two Biblical principles that can help us understand how to accomplish this:
 - 1) The first is giving as the Lord blesses and prospers us:
 - a) 1 Corinthians 16:2 **"On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come."**
 - b) 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, esp. 12-14 (READ)
 - 2) The second is giving when we see need:
 - a) Deuteronomy 15:7: **"If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother;"**
 - b) 1 John 3:17: **"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?"**

B. The fellowship of the early Church was threatened by deceit and self-promotion (5:1-11)

1. In the previous chapter we looked at last week we saw the first real EXTERNAL threat against the Church as the religious leaders arrested and threatened Peter and John
2. Luke is now going to reveal the first real INTERNAL threat against the Church
3. In contrast to the example set by Barnabas and others, he introduces us to a husband and wife named Ananias and Sapphira—while Barnabas is enshrined in Scripture and forever remembered for his act of genuine, selfless giving, they are remembered for something very different:
 - a. Let's look at Ananias (READ 5:1-6):
 - 1) Much like others, Ananias sold a piece of property and gave a **"portion"** of it to the Apostles—nothing wrong here, right?

- 2) However, Peter accuses him of allowing Satan to fill his heart which resulted in lying to the Holy Spirit and keeping back some of the proceeds:
 - a) Most English Bibles render this verse as lying **to** the Holy Spirit
 - b) However, Holy Spirit is in accusative rather than the dative making it the object of the verb; so lying **about** or misrepresenting the works of the Holy Spirit seems more probable: **“Why has Satan filled your heart so that you would lie about the Holy Spirit...”** (which is also supported by Witherington)
 - c) In other words, while the actions of the other believers were demonstrations of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, Ananias actions were a counterfeit act, only appearing to be the work of the Holy Spirit but actually the work of Satan

 - 3) At this moment, we don’t actually know yet specifically what Ananias did that was so egregious (that will be revealed in a minute); However, the problem wasn’t actually that he kept a portion of the proceeds for himself:
 - a) In v. 4 Peter makes it clear that before the sale, the property was his, implying that he wasn’t under obligation to sell it and give it to the Church
 - b) Even after the sale, Peter says that the proceeds from the sale were **“under [his] control”** meaning he could do with it as he pleased; he wasn’t under obligation to give all of it, or even any of it, to the Church
 - c) However, something in Ananias’ actions turned a potentially generous deed of selling property and giving away the proceeds, into a lie not just against man (the Apostles and the Church), but God (4)

 - 4) As a result, the Lord took Ananias’ life (5)
 - 5) So, what was so egregious that the Lord would judge Ananias so harshly? We’ll find out in a moment.
- b. Now let’s look at Sapphira (READ 5:7-10):
- 1) Three hours go by and Sapphira arrives, completely unaware that her husband has died
 - 2) Peter confronts her with a very simple question, and I’m paraphrasing here: **“Did you sell the property for this amount?”**
 - a) The amount Peter provided was the amount she and her husband **claimed** they got for the land
 - b) Remember, she doesn’t know yet that her husband is dead, or that Peter knows the real price they got for the property, or that he knows she conspired right along with her husband—verse 1-2 said that she and Ananias sold the land and that she had **“full knowledge”**
 - c) Instead of coming clean, Sapphira continues the con and lies to Peter about the price
 - d) So, Peter confronts her and accuses her of **“agree[ing] together [with her husband] to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test”** (9)
 - e) And, like her husband, the Lord judges her by taking her life (10)
- c. The deception and self-promotion we see in Ananias and Sapphira were a direct threat to the fellowship and the sharing and caring spirit of the early Church:
- 1) It was an INTERNAL threat meaning it came not from outside the Church
 - 2) Sometimes internal threats can be much more dangerous and cause significantly more damage

- 3) While others were selling their possessions as a genuine act of sacrificial giving, Ananias and Sapphira saw it as an opportunity for self-promotion
- 4) Others gave because they were concerned for those in need; Ananias and Sapphira gave because it made them look good—in fact, they attempted to make themselves look more generous than they actually were

Woman who waited every week until the offering was done, and would then stand up and wave her offering in the air for the ushers to come collect it

4. Takeaway:
 - a. There is no place in God's church for deceit and self-promotion
 - b. When self-aggrandizement is found within the body of Christ, like it was with Ananias and Sapphira, it threatens the fellowship we share because it puts our focus on ourselves rather than others
 - c. Jesus had something to say about such behavior when warning the people about the Scribes and Pharisees (READ Matthew 23:5-12)
 - d. This might explain why God dealt with it so severely in the case of Ananias and Sapphira—he wanted their judgment to serve as a warning (READ 5:11)