

Acts 4:32–37 (NIV)

- 1) Here, we see a very interesting set of circumstances laid out by Luke.
- 2) He has already told us of the unity of heart and mind of the believers in Jerusalem.
- 3) Obviously, this leads to a communal living situation.
- 4) There are several things we can determine from studying what others have found here.
 - a) First, communal living was not a strange concept to the Jewish mentality.
 - i) One great example is the community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran.
 - ii) In them, we find a description of a ‘covenant community’ (called the Yahad) which was formed by a person called the “Teacher of Righteousness”.
 - iii) This person probably lived in the first century BCE or somewhat before.
 - iv) As I mentioned a few weeks ago, the general scholarly opinion today is that this was the Essenes though there is still much debate regarding this.
 - v) The true bottom line is that the Christians in Jerusalem did basically the same thing but obviously in the name of Jesus and, for different core reasons.
 - vi) In the case of the Qumran community, the reason was that it was part of their religious beliefs.
 - (1) They were very ascetic in their disciplines and one of their main purposes in establishing this community in this remote area was likely isolation.
 - vii) The Christians, on the other hand, did this out of necessity – the situation dictated that they had to support each other in this manner and it was an act of love for their new found brothers and sisters.
 - b) This is really the second major item we should see in this passage – we are definitely not dealing with communism – instead, we are dealing with a purely voluntary action on the parts of these believers.
 - i) They did not sell the house in which they were living – if they had done that then they would obviously not have had a place to live.
 - ii) Instead, it was extra properties that were being sold.
 - iii) The idea was taking care of the needs of the members of their community who were in need.
 - c) As we have discussed before, God never asks us to give up everything only share what we have.
 - i) The only time Jesus ask someone to give all they possessed was the rich young ruler and even though he was to give it to the poor, that was not the purpose.

- (1) The purpose was to remove a stumbling block from the man's path.
- 5) One point that N.T. Wright makes which I think is really on target. The whole idea here is seeing the needs of others in our community (church if you will) as our needs.
- a) Raising the level of importance of these needs once our attitude adjusts to that concept.
To quote:

What you do with money and possessions declares loudly what sort of a community you are, and the statement made by the early church's practice was clear and definite. No wonder they were able to give such powerful testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. They were demonstrating that it was a reality in ways that many Christians today, who often sadly balk at even giving a tithe of their income to the church, can only dream of.

Wright, N. T.. Acts for Everyone, Part One: 1 (The New Testament for Everyone) (pp. 76-77). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

Altamesa has always been know as a generous congregation.

Having said that, do you think our level of awareness and caring for our members reaches the level of these folks?

If our answer is NO, then two other questions:

Do we need to be like that group of Christians in Jerusalem?

Why? Why Not? Perhaps, to what level?

If we do need to be like them what do you see as a way for us to get there?

If our answer is yes, then what are some (or one) examples?

Now, same questions – how about us as individuals?

Do we need to be like that willing to look at others needs as our own?

Why? Why Not? Perhaps, to what level?

If we do what do you see as a way for us to get there?

- 6) One other comment on this before we consider Barnabas in particular.
- a) This communal living was NOT a permanent way of living for the church as a whole.
- b) Within a short while, Stephen would be stoned and the great persecution will break out.
- c) That will cause the church to disperse throughout Judea and basically all parts of the Levant.
- 7) So, let's take a quick look at this mention of Barnabas.

- a) First, the consensus is that this is the same Joseph who is nicknamed Barnabas who is friends with Paul and accompanies him on his missionary journeys.
 - b) Interesting fact that may have escaped notice is that he is of the tribe of Levi.
 - c) This meant that he could not own property in Israel proper (Levites were forbidden to own land in Israel—see Numbers 18:20–24 and Deuteronomy 10:9; 18:1–2).
 - d) Therefore, the property he sold was likely in Cyprus where he was from, and, of course is one of the places he and Paul visit on their journeys.
- 8) As MacArthur points out, Luke is not concerned about where the property was – his point is to show how this “son of encouragement” gave selflessly to the cause being discussed.
- a) Very important to keep this in mind as we proceed on ...

Comments / Questions?

- 9) Well, as with all things involving humans, it doesn’t take long before things get a little messed up. Beginning in 5 verse 1 we read

Acts 5:1–11 (NIV)

- 1) There is definitely a sharp contrast between the actions of these two folks and Barnabas.
- 2) The obvious sin here is that both Ananias and his wife lied regarding the amount of the money.
 - a) They said that the price for the property was X and they gave X.
 - b) In truth, the price they received for the property was Y and they gave X which was only part of Y.
- 3) Now, when we look at this, it is really sad. As Peter points out, they were not required to give any of the proceeds of the property to the apostles.
- 4) They had total control of the property and of the money received through the entire process.
- 5) The truth is, they could have received price Y, said they received price Y but were giving X and all would have been fine – TRUTH IN GIVING!!
- 6) However, the aggregate part of this was two fold – they lied AND they lied to make themselves look good in the eyes of the apostles and probably their friends in the congregation.
 - a) Lied to the Holy Spirit, to God, and to the congregation of believers.
 - b) Hypocrisy and desire for elevated spiritual status are at the center of their motives.
- 7) Jesus finds hypocrisy to be a most serious sin. He calls attention to this many times in His ministry.

Matthew 6:1–4 (NIV)

8) Then later in Matthew, He gets even more pointed in what he says.

Matthew 23:29–33 (NIV)

9) It has been almost 900 years (approx. 842 BCE) since the last person was executed by God in the Old Testament.

a) We read in 2 Chronicles 21:18-19 about King Jehoram who was afflicted by God and died because of his sin.

10) The only other directly caused death by God in the New Testament is that of Herod Agrippa.

a) The people shouted that his was the voice of God not man. His sin was that he did not correct the situation. The sin that caused his demise was he did not correct them. He let them think that.

Acts 12:21–23 (NIV)

11) We obviously do not know what the actual cause of death was for Ananias or Sapphira – heart attack, stroke, fright – we just are not told.

12) What we can, I think, know for sure is that it was God’s hand that performed the deed.

13) About 3 hours later, same song, second verse – Sapphira lies the same way with, we can assume the same intent and, of course with the same outcome – she dies instantly.

14) Lets try to answer a couple of questions here.

First question in the middle of this is

We are not God – we cannot make that call for true however, – honest answer – does this seem to you to be a sin deserving of death for both of them?

- What we do know is that in God’s eyes, there are no big vs. little sins – sin is sin!

15) Before we get to the next question, here are some things to consider.

a) We see no room for repentance so it can’t be that.

b) It is swift and complete for both of them so it can’t be a lesson for Sapphira alone.

c) N.T. Wright makes the point that holiness is really a part of temple worship.

d) If we consider this new church as a substitute for that temple, we can see a need for that holiness.

e) There were strict rules regarding actions in the temple.

i) Holy of Holies – only entered with many cautions once per year by the high priest.

ii) Sign warning Gentiles of the fact they could be executed if they went beyond a certain point.

iii) Women were also under strict requirements as to where they could go.

f) Wright further comments:

Holiness, in other words, is not an optional extra. How God chooses to make that point is in the last analysis up to him, since he is the only one who knows the human heart. But the earliest Christians were quite clear. To name the name of Jesus, and to invoke the holy spirit, is to claim to be the Temple of the living God, and that is bound to have consequences.

Wright, N. T.. Acts for Everyone, Part One: 1 (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 81). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

16) Questions for the week that we will begin with next time.

So, we have to ask the question then what was God's purpose? Was it strictly punishment?

Is holiness an option? How serious should be take the idea of being holy as He is holy?