**The Fear of God** Acts 4:32-5:16 [www.bible-sermons.org](http://www.bible-sermons.org) March 26, 2017

Peter and John had just been threatened by the Sanhedrin to stop preaching and healing in the name of Jesus. They relayed the threat to their friends and immediately went to prayer. Their prayer was not for protection, but for boldness to go on proclaiming the Good News of Jesus. The Lord answered by shaking the building and filling them again with the Holy Spirit.

*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.* Acts 4:32 We saw this at the end of chapter two, but it is reiterated here because we need to be reminded of how important it is to be in unity and have such a love for one another that we are willing to meet any needs we see. That does not mean that we enable people not to be careful with their spending habits, or to allow some to take advantage of others when they could work. Some of the believers in Thessalonica tried that. Paul’s response was that if they refused to work they shouldn’t be given food (2 Thessalonians 3:10-11). The New Testament is very realistic in dealing with human nature.

The prerequisite for their generosity was the fact that they had one heart and soul. The Greek words translated here as heart and soul mean that their thoughts, desires, and life purpose were the same. They knew Jesus had died for their sins and conquered death (Acts 2:38). They knew they were filled with the Spirit of the living God to go and proclaim that message to the world. There is a wonderful comradery in sharing the same heart and soul. Somehow you know when you meet someone that has that same passion for Jesus that you do. The love of God in you will help them if they have a need (1 John 3:17). I’ve seen that in this congregation countless times. Believers know their possessions are from the Lord and are at His disposal to use as He pleases.

That was a special time in church history. We’ll see in the next verse that it was due to the great grace that was upon them all. Jesus warned that it wouldn’t always be that way by teaching that there would be weeds amongst the wheat until the end. We are about to see the first effort of Satan to sow those weeds (Matthew 13:24-30). But remember, the church at that time consisted of the converts who came for the Pentecost Feast and who were filled with the Spirit, along with those who were converted at the time the lame man was healed. Many of them will go back to their homelands and take the Gospel with them. They needed to be strong and pure in their doctrines and convictions to be able to begin churches wherever they went or else the message would soon be corrupted.

*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.* Acts 4:33 The signs and wonders done by the hands of the Apostles confirmed their message that Jesus had conquered death and now has all authority. Their words came with great power. It still happens in the world today as the Holy Spirit proclaims that truth through people.

When I knew I was called to pastor, I began watching preachers and asked myself why certain ones’ messages came with power that others didn’t seem to have. I concluded that it was not so much how they delivered their message, for Duncan Campbell and Jonathan Edwards preached with their faces in their sermon transcripts. It was not the eloquent words that they chose, for to simply read Moody and others’ sermons just didn’t carry the same impact (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). Nor did education seem to be the big difference. I concluded that it was their personal walk with the Lord, their love for His Word, and their utter surrender to the Lord’s will for their lives that preceded the power. They were filled with the Spirit. These early believers needed to know the Apostles’ Doctrine, but their personal relationship with Jesus invites the power of the Spirit to help them to build congregations in their hometowns. Someone has said that if you want to grow a church, get on fire for God and people will come to watch you burn. I would add that many who come to watch will catch on fire as well. We are attracted to genuine passion. The generosity of the early church was evidence of their conviction.

*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.* Acts 4:34-35 How amazing that early church was! The great grace that was upon them all was manifested in their love for one another (John 13:35). Selfishness had no place. It is interesting to me that they didn’t meet the need directly, but brought it to the apostles. To lay it at their feet means to give it to be used as they saw fit. It was recognition of their authority. Apostles were the official representatives of Jesus, hand chosen by Jesus (Luke 6:13). Remember, Jesus didn’t write a book. He invested all His teaching into these men who were then to pass it on verbally and later in writing.

Once the apostles received the money or goods, they distributed them as they saw the need. In chapter six we will see that this duty was given to the deacons (Acts 6:2-3). The important point is that the believers didn’t seek recognition by giving the help directly to the need they saw. They trusted the discernment of the apostles as God’s appointed leaders. That is how we deal with the benevolent fund in this church. In that way, you can help those in need anonymously (Matthew 6:4). Of course, there is an accountability system in place.

*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.* Acts 4:36-37 Luke chose an example of a man who would appear later in this book to demonstrate how the needs of this growing community were met. One of the early church fathers wrote that Barnabas was one of the seventy-two disciples that Jesus sent out (Luke 10:1).

*1 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.* Acts 5:1-2 Here we have that sowing of the weeds I mentioned earlier. The movement was growing and gaining popularity. That attracts people who are seeking power or position. You might say they want to be big fish in a little pond. They are not filled with the Spirit. They are not surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus. As the next verses will show, there was nothing wrong with keeping part of the sale price. Giving was voluntary. Unlike numerous cults today, you could do what you wanted with your possessions; you just needed to be honest about it.

*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.”* Acts 5:3-4 The Spirit gave Peter supernatural knowledge of what had transpired. It was a Satanic attack on the unity and purity of the early church. Satan filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit. After seeing the miracles that the Apostles performed and hearing the wonder of the resurrection and teachings of Jesus, Ananias allowed his heart to be filled with Satan’s lie rather than to be filled with the Spirit. He may have thought he could deceive Peter, but you can’t deceive the Holy Spirit.

Peter asked why he contrived the deed in his heart. I can only surmise that Ananias was seeking to become influential in the church by pretending to be totally dedicated while seeking position and influence for his own pride (3 John 1:9). We’ve had that kind of subversive deception in this church in the past. They will always seek leadership to advance their hidden agenda. Fortunately, your elders discerned it. I’d much rather face outright false doctrine than lying deceivers who have a hidden agenda.

*5 When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.* Acts 5:5 God kept the early church weed free for as long as was needed to get the pure Gospel out to the world. Some people think the God of the Old Testament is harsh and quick to judge, while the God of the New Testament is all love and grace. That tells me they haven’t read the Bible. The most commonly mentioned attribute of God in the Old Testament is steadfast love. In both testaments, His is just and holy (John 5:22). That means that even though He is gracious, He must be just (See Psalm 75).

The fear of God is a healthy thing for us all (Psalm 34:9). By that I don’t mean constantly thinking that God will whack you for any mistake you make, but rather we should recognize that the holiness of God will not be compromised. *6 By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.* Proverbs 16:6 We are so grateful for the steadfast love and grace of God, but we should never trample on that love and grace (Hebrews 6:4-6; Romans 6:1-2). As children of God we should expect God’s discipline if we intentionally sin (Hebrews 12:10). Only God knows the havoc Ananias and his wife would have wrought had they been able to carry on their deception and bring compromise into the early church.

*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.* Acts 5:6-7 Burials in Israel in the first century took place the same day the person died. Everyone would stop work and participate in the mourning process. That the wife didn’t know her husband died meant there was no mourning process or gathering of the community as the man, having been smitten by God, was held in dishonor.

*8 And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.”* Acts 5:8 Peter gave her a chance to come clean. It was a direct question. It reminds me of Jesus handing the morsel to Judas, a sign of friendship at the Last Supper, just before the betrayal (John 13:26). God gives us chances and confronts us with our sin so we can turn and not have to face the consequences.

*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.* Acts 5:9-10 I’ve witnessed both the seemingly delayed judgments of God and the swift and sudden ones. It is no different today. Sometimes I wonder why God doesn’t deal with a situation, but then, God knows so much more about the whole situation and the person’s heart than I do. We must trust God. But know that you should never tempt God (Deuteronomy 6:16). And remember that when you have that direct question that gives you the chance to be honest, don’t continue the lie. Most importantly, don’t ever think you can lie to the Holy Spirit. We need a healthy fear of God in the church today. We would have more of it if we were willing to recognize God’s swift dealings in our own lives and in others.

*11 And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.* Acts 5:11 You can imagine how this judgment kept others from pretending to be believers. There is the same effect today in nations where Christians are persecuted. No one takes joining a local congregation lightly. They don’t join to make business contacts. There is no pretending there. Only those who are willing to lay down their lives will join the fellowship of persecuted believers (1 John 3:16). I can’t help but think that persecution will eventually purge the church in America of those who would pretend to be committed to Jesus.

*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.* Acts 5:12 They were still meeting in the temple at this point. Signs and wonders were testifying to the truth of their message. That is one reason Ananias and Sapphira should have known better than to try to lie to the Holy Spirit. This also shows the protection of God over the believers that they could still meet there after being forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18).

*13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.* Acts 5:13 This was the effect of the judgment of God. While the public knew something miraculous was happening, they wouldn’t join the believers unless they were truly willing to be followers of Jesus at any cost. That isn’t a bad thing. We aren’t here simply for numbers of attendees. We are here to make disciples, dedicated, sold out, followers of Jesus (Luke 14:33; Matthew 16:24).

*14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,* Acts 5:14 We saw at the end of Acts chapter two that the Lord added to the church daily (Acts 2:47). The rate of new converts was picking up. The threats of the Sanhedrin had not stopped the growth of the church. In fact, the opposite was true. The disciples had not given in to fear. This was a mighty move of the Spirit to begin the church. I pray for another move like that here before the return of Jesus.

*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.* Acts 5:15-16 The belief that a shadow could do harm or good was common in that day. God allowed them to be healed because of their faith, despite the superstition. God overlooks these false ideas if in the process we are being drawn to faith in Jesus. Can you imagine the scene, the power of the Spirit that was present, and the wonder when *all* were healed? This was beyond the *earthly* ministry of Jesus, and Jesus had predicted it would be so (John 14:12). Jesus is still at work, only now it is His life in and through His followers. What a glorious and yet fearful beginning of the church!

If you were there, would you have dared to join them? The decision is the same today, for God never changes (Hebrews 13:8). Today there are weeds among the wheat, and God allows it to be so. But even if you recognize you are a weed, there is hope. God can make anything new (Revelation 21:5). Transformation is possible (2 Corinthians 5:17). Every follower of Jesus is transformed. We were all by nature objects of wrath, but we threw ourselves upon the mercy of God (Ephesians 2:3-5). That is what this passage invites us to do. You may escape judgment in this life, but we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:10-11). No one will get away with lying to the Holy Spirit then. But those in Christ Jesus, who have trusted in what He did for them, will be found blameless (2 Corinthians 5:21). If you haven’t already put your faith in Jesus, will you trust Him today?

Questions

1 What does one heart and soul mean?

2 What was unique about this time in church history?

3 How can our words be powerful and convincing?

4 Why are the apostles so special and trustworthy?

5 What was Ananias and Sapphira’s sin?

6 Why was that so serious?

7 Why should we fear the Lord?

8 What was the effect on the public?

9 So why did more people convert?

10 Why were people healed despite superstition?