

## WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Christ Church, Crouch End Hill

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No: 24

### Acts Chapter 4: 32 – 5: 16

#### INTRODUCTION

As the Holy Spirit manifested His power in the early church there was an increase of holy zeal in the teachers and the hearers augmented this by a visible display of heavenly love. That love of their Saviour drew them together in a remarkable unity of heart and mind and led them to give freely of themselves and their substance for the collective good of the body as a whole.

As an example of the believers who sold some property to help the poorer Christians, Luke singles out one man - best remembered by his second name, 'Barnabas' (4:36-37). He was a Levite from Cyprus, who was later to become a prominent figure in the missionary expansion of the church (Acts 9:27; 11:19-26). Here was a man who spans the ministry of both the Old and New Testaments.

In contrast to Barnabas, Ananias and his wife Sapphira paint a sorry and discouraging picture. Hypocrisy is an evil mask. Even their names leave an acidulous after-taste, for his name means 'God is gracious' and hers 'beautiful'. They had names that they were alive (Rev 3:1) but carried a lie in their right hands (Isaiah 44:20).

#### Questions for discussions

- At what point and with what group have you sensed the most unity: Athletic team? Army Unit? Bible Study?  
Your family? Others?
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- What religious practice did you once do "just because everyone else did it that way," but you have since "outgrown"?
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- Were Ananias and Sapphira required to sell the land and lay all the money at the apostles feet? Why? or Why not?

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- a) What would Ananias and Sapphira gain by lying about the money they received?

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b) How is your answer related to verses 32-37?

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- Given that we all do bad things, why do you think God punished Ananias and Sapphira so severely?

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- How would the incident with Ananias and Sapphira lead to the response of people in verses 13-14?

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- How well does verse 32 describe your relationship with others in your church?

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- Compare this passage with Joshua 7. What parallels can you draw?
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### **Note**

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira showed contempt for God. They acted in a spirit of unbelief and they despised the church of Jesus Christ. They were concerned to impress God's people. "This sin has no doubt been replicated on innumerable occasions in the last two thousand years and people have not been dropping dead in the act of their deception. Why then did Ananias and Sapphira receive such unique and instantly draconian punishment? The answer is to be found in the parallel with the very similar case of Achan, recorded in Joshua 7. Achan and Ananias each illicitly appropriated portions of that which had been devoted to the Lord and did so at the beginning of a new phase in the life of the people of God — the former at the entrance into the land of promise, the latter at the inauguration of the New Testament church. The church was the fulfillment and embodiment of that of which the promised land was the foreshadowing.

This remarkable parallel renders intelligible the Lord's very rare suspension of his longsuffering handling of human sin. Almost everywhere else — even with respect to the destruction of the Canaanite nations, in which he waited more than four centuries until their sin 'reached its full measure' (Gen. 15:16) — God has shown himself very 'slow to anger, abounding in love' (Ps. 103:8). 'The sin of Ananias and Sapphira', writes Francis Schaeffer, 'was followed by judgement, because sin would have stopped the church's advance... If this sin of acting from bad motivation in order to be superficially accepted by the church had been allowed to grow in the church's heart, the whole advance would have been endangered. But after the judgement, the early church went on in power.' God decisively demonstrated his righteous might and gave notice of his determination to preserve his church.

