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Lessons from the Early Church

Acts 4:32-5:1-11

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The early church was united around common beliefs and common burdens—the belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior—and the burden of being persecuted by those who opposed them. Jews in the first century who believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior were killed at worst and canceled at best. As a result of facing such real persecution, the early church followers pooled their resources and shared them with each other as needed. It was not socialism, it was survivalism. In addition, when God struck down Ananias and Sapphira for their deception, the early church quickly learned that “the Church pure is the Church powerful” (as G. Campbell Morgan once said). They developed a healthy “fear of the Lord” and walked in holiness before God. The early church serves as a good example for the Church today.

1. [Acts 4:32-37; 5:1-11](#) – *“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.’ Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men*

arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?' She said, 'Yes, for so much.' Then Peter said to her, 'How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.' Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things."

2. The early church was not practicing socialism; they were practicing survivalism
 - a. The early church was driven by common beliefs and common burdens; to survive amid persecution, they had to pool their resources
 - b. We are not to make a pattern out of a practice
 - c. The Bible teaches hard work, not socialism
 - i. [2 Thessalonians 3:10b](#) - *"If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."*
 - ii. [1 Timothy 5:8](#) - *"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."*
 - iii. [Proverbs 12:11](#) - *"Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense." (ESV)*
 - iv. [Proverbs 14:23](#) - *"All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty." (1984 NIV)*
 - v. [2 Thessalonians 3:8](#) - *"...nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you." (1984 NIV)*
3. The early church was not *mandated* by the law to give, they were *motivated* by the heart
 - a. God did not kill Ananias and Sapphira for keeping back part of the proceeds from the sale of their land
 - b. God killed Ananias and Sapphira for saying that they had given all the proceeds as an offering when they had not
 - c. God took a drastic measure to communicate a drastic message
4. The early church had to learn that "the Church **pure** is the Church **powerful**" (G. Campbell Morgan)
 - a. God made an example of Ananias and Sapphira to communicate a message
 - i. He hates willful disobedience
 - ii. He is a holy God and expects holiness from His people
 - b. [2 Corinthians 7:1](#) - *"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."*

5. The early church walked in “the fear of the Lord”
 - a. When we engage in deliberate sin, we don’t have an adequate fear of the Lord
 - b. A healthy fear of the Lord motivates holy living; when we fear God, we sin less
 - c. We must balance God as a loving Father with God as a righteous judge
 - d. We can acquire this view through our own determination or through painful consequences

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Acts 4:32-37; 5:1-11](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Why did the early church pool their resources? (See #2a above)
3. Does the Bible teach socialism? How do we know? (See #2b and #2c above)
4. Why did God kill Ananias and Sapphira? Why did He use such drastic measures? (See #3b and #3c above)
5. What does God’s response to Ananias’ and Sapphira’s sin tell us about God? (See #4a-i and #4a-ii above)
6. Read [2 Corinthians 7:1](#). What is “the fear of the Lord?” (See #4b above)
7. Why do we need a healthy fear of the Lord? (See #5a and #5b above)
8. What happens when we do not have a healthy fear of the Lord? (See #5d above)
9. Compare and contrast a time when you did not have an adequate fear of the Lord with a time when you did have a healthy fear of the Lord. What were the results?
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)