Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Sins of the Saints
Scripture: Acts 4:32-5:11
Code: 1716

Turn in your Bibles to Acts, chapter 4. We're going to study the passage that was read earlier, verses 32 through chapter 5, verse 11. We've entitled this message, "The Sins Of The Saints," and we'll see the reason for that as we go along. We've been studying in the Book of Acts now for some months. The church has been born, in all of its pristine beauty and freshness and vitality; it is unstained as of yet. And these early days of the church's history are bright, and they're happy days, and they're days that are full of love, and fellowship is real. The joy is overwhelming and the love is all inclusive, and it's deep and consequently their testimony is loud and it is clear, and the results have been that some 15 to 20 thousand have come to name the name of Jesus Christ, in just a few days or weeks since the crucified leader died, and rose again. And then when Satan began to try to thwart the purpose of the church by external persecution, they were victorious, and they only prayed for more boldness, and more boldness came and more people were saved and it grew beyond that. God was very real and Christ was very much alive, and the Holy Spirit was very much displayed in great power, in those days. Really, there had never been days like those days since before Adam fell. For never before had Messiah come and sins been forgiven and full fellowship with God been restored and new life been implanted and new natures been put within the believers. Never before had there been a resident Holy Spirit, this was not so since the days of Adam. But you can be sure that if all was well and all was beautiful and God was moving and Christ was exalted and the Holy Spirit was powerful that Satan would be active. For Satan had long ago declared himself in open rebellion against God, and the one who would design to thwart every purpose of God, old or new. And so we do not even get past chapter 5, the church only having been born, in chapter 2, until we see it already beginning to be cut, and torn, and ripped by Satan. And as we come to our message this morning, we are going to see the first occasion of sin in the church. There are many firsts in the Book of Acts, this is the saddest of all. Satan, by his effort to persecute the church had failed and as so often is the case he had over reached himself, in an effort to persecute Peter and John, he had only given them the opportunity to preach the gospel to the Sanhedrin. In an effort to stop the church's boldness, he had only allowed them the privilege of increasing it. In an effort to halt the number of conversions, he had only multiplied it. And Satan found out that external pressure only tends to fan the flame. And Satan knew that he had to get at the very base of the fire, and put it out there, and so he began to infiltrate the church and what begins in chapter 5 is still going on today. We are face to face in this passage then with the first incident of sin in the church. And it's a heart-breaking text, because this is the beginning of that which has contin-ued to plague and disease and cripple and even in some cases, kill the church, throughout history, the sins of the saints. And I'm not talk-ing about the sins of unbelievers, and I'm not talking about external persecution, I'm talking about that most devastating thing in

existence, the sins of believers within the church. And as I studied this week and as God spoke to my heart and I made some commitments in my own life, and prayed some deep prayers from within my own heart, I prayed at the same time, that you would in hearing this respond to the Spirit as I have. Just as a footnote, I think it's interesting and we should al-ways note this, that this passage is a kind of a classic portrait of the fact that the Bible has a kind of stubborn honesty. You see God could have painted a glossy picture of the church, but that would have only confused the issue, because if we thought the church then, was perfect and we look at the church now and see what imperfections it has, we might be a little bit hard pressed to understand that it is the same thing. And besides, God never leaves the truth out, even though it's painful and ugly. The church is not perfect. People always say, well I'd go to the church but there are too many hypocrites. And I always think, well that's all right, we have room for more. That's a hypocritical answer. We know that there are hypocrites in the church, there were hypocrites in Acts 5 in the church, we know that. But the very presence of a counterfeit is the greatest vindication that there is somewhere a real. We know that the church is a hospital for the spiritually sick, but at least they know they're sick. The church is not what Henry Knox Sherill said, quote, "A nice clean refrigerator designed to keep a few select souls from spoiling." That's not the church. The church is imperfect, it always has been. Once a court painter was commissioned to paint a portrait of the great Cromwell, and of course wanting to win favor with Cromwell, he decided he'd have to doctor it a little, because Cromwell's face was rather ugly, being dis-figured with a whole group of warts. And so the painter thought, well I'll just remove the warts, so he painted the portrait thusly, present-ed it to Cromwell, Cromwell took a look at the picture and said take it back and paint me warts and all. And it's interesting to realize that this is exactly what God has done throughout the revelation of the Word of God. God never glosses over anything. God is never involved in covering the issue. Whatever hero it may be in the Bible, he's painted warts and all. And so it is in the picture of the early church God is honest, as always, and we see it as it was. And there's a certain kind of encouragement in it, you say, well how could you be encouraged by sin? I'm not encouraged by sin, I'm only encouraged by the fact that they had the same problem then that we've got now. Because that gives me a little bit of comradery with some of those early men. I mean I even rejoice when I realize that on some occasions Paul baptized the wrong person, when he wasn't really a believer, you say, are you glad that the guy wasn't a believer? No, I'm only glad that what I'm seeing today in the church and what happens in my own life isn't something brand new, but that it's always been a problem that the church has been infiltrated by hypocrisy. It's nothing new, and you know the apostle Paul went through a lot of things, but the thing that tore him up the most were the sins of the saints. Over in Second Corinthians chapter 11, verses 24 to 28, he makes a big long list of things, and he says, I've been shipwrecked three times, and I've been stoned, and I've been beaten with rods three times, and I've been whipped with lashes, 39 lashes repeatedly, and I've suffered in perils of waters and perils of the sea, mine own countrymen, the gentiles and all of these things, and I've been a night and a day in the deep, and I've been in cold and nakedness and hunger and thirst and I've been through all of this, but let me tell ya my biggest problem, the care of the churches. You say, what's the problem? There's a lot of converted people there. The pro-blem is the sins of the believers

that are in there. That's the problem, that's the crying thing, that aches and pains the heart of every man of God, and has since Acts chapter 5, and it began with poor Peter. And he came face to face with the sins of the saints and nobody who has ever worked with the saints since has been free of it. And it's the thing that eats and tears away at the work that God would do in His church. And the apostle Paul was forever talking about this. He never wrote one letter in the New Testament that didn't have something in it of a major consequence about the sins of believers. In the Roman letter, he says in 16:17, "I beseech you, brethren, mark them who cause divi-sions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned and avoid them." And he says in the next verse, "For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ but their own body, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the innocent." Watch out for those who are gonna get in there, and they're gonna cause division. To the Corinthians he said the same thing. I can't speak unto you as spiritual, but unto carnal, you're fighting all the time. To the Gala-tians he said the same thing in chapter 3. He says, Oh foolish Galat-ians, who tricked you, have you begun in the Spirit and now you're go-ing to be perfected in the flesh? They got caught in legalism. He said to the Ephesians, Come on; he says, People, walk worthy of that which you've been called to do, humble yourselves and endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. He knew what the potential for problems was in the church. To the Philippians he says, if there's any comfort of love, if there's any consolation in Christ, if there's any compassion, if there's any of this stuff, be likeminded. And then he even named two women, he said now I wanta mark out Euodia and Syntyche, those two women that are hassling in the church, and I wanta tell you true yoke-fellow, which is in the Greek, *suzugos*, and may have been a proper name. He may have been saying, Now you tell Suzugos to go over there and shape those two up. He even got so brass as to name some of the individuals in a public letter for the whole church to hear. The sin of the saints was a sad thing. It was a blight that Paul never got away from. In the third chapter of Colossians he repeats a whole list of things and he says, Colossians, will you clean it up? In that church, will you clean it up? There's sin in your church. He told the same thing in every letter that he wrote, because that's the problem of the church.

So here in Acts, the sad process of the sins of the saints gets its beginning. And it's a stark contrast I dare say to the sweet joy and the beauty of the unity of love that exists up to chapter 5. You only have two chapters, really, chapter 2 and chapter 3 and part of chapter 4, and we see the sweetness of this thing and it's gone in chapter 5. And from then on, throughout the whole New Testament it's a plea for unity and a plea for love and a plea for fellowship and a plea for bel-ievers to clean up their lives. And we're not done pleading even yet.

So the text is divided into two parts and we'll just see those two parts this morning. There's a beautiful backdrop from 32 to 37 of the purity of the church, it's beautiful. And then there's a black sick picture from 1 to 11 of the impurity of the church. We'll call it the sharing of the saints and the sins of the saints.

First of all, let's look at the sharing of the saints. The shar-ing of the saints is in verses 32 to 37 and it portrays for us just a little glimpse, so small and so concise and so terse, and it dosen't really say much, in terms of detail but it says much in terms of truth about the sharing of the saints. It's a positive picture, before we look at a bleak negative, and it's for the sake of contrast as so often is done by the Spirit of God in the text. Now there are four features that we'll consider under the sharing of the saints, just to help you divide the text up, and we'll elutriate 'em so you can kinda remember them. First of all, spiritual participation. The first thing that he mentions about that congregation that is now burgeoned and blossomed to include maybe 15 to 20 thousand, the first thing now they've multiplied and, and it says in verse 32, and the multitude of those that believed were of one heart and of one soul. The first and beautiful thing about it was that there was a real spiritual participation, not just that they all belonged to the same organization, not an organizational thing at all, but a real thing, they had one heart and one soul. They felt what everybody felt unitedly. They thought unitedly, they were like one big brain, they were the truest sense, the body. They had one heartbeat and one soul. There was a commonness among them. Notice in verse 32 it says, "and a multitude of those that believed." You know that this is a new group, added to the other group, because in chapter 4 verse 31, it says, they went out and spoke the Word with boldness and the multitude of those that believed. It's growing now, and you notice that they don't number them anymore, it's getting too big to even num-ber, so many are comin' to Christ. You say, well what was it that was bringing them? It was this fantastic testimony of love and unity. Jesus had said in John 13, ah, here's a new commandment I'm goin' give you, love one another, and He said, "by this shall all men know that you're my disciples." They'll be drawn to you if they see your love--and they did and they were. And in John chapter 17:21 Jesus said, if you'll only be one, the world will know that God sent Me. And they were one, and the world knew, and the world watched and many believed. And so the church had grown to the place where they don't even number it anymore, and as big as it was, over 20,000 people they were one. You say, it's impossible, no, it's not. It's not impossible. You say, what made them one? Two things, a preoccupation with each other, and a pre-occupation with taking the gospel to the lost. They were so busy worry-ing about the needs of each other they couldn't have cared less about their own glory and their own self esteem and their own satisfaction. They were so busy running around making sure everybody else's need got met that they couldn't have cared less about themselves. Secondly, they were too busy winning the world to Jesus to bother with trivial-ites. They had two priorities that Jesus had given them, get together and reach the world. That's all He ever said for them to do. Just be one and reach the world. And they were too busy doin' that to get lost in anything else. And so there was a kind of genuineness and a kind of unity that has never existed since in the church. To the shame of the church. One heart, one soul. Oh, how different it would be today; how different! You say, Well how do you get that unity? And we've talked about it so many times, only just a review, quick. Unity comes from love, love comes from humility, humility comes from a correct evalua-tion of yourself, the right spiritual knowledge. If you really see who you are in relation to Jesus Christ, there's only one thing you can be, humble. And if you're really humble there is only one thing you can do, really love, and if you really love there's only one thing that comes out of it, unity. And they had it. And they were

preoccupied with each other, and with winning the world. They were too busy winning the world to worry about their own needs and their own selves, and so con-sequently everybody was caring for everybody else and you didn't have to care for yourself. What a beautiful kind of preoccupation, oh my, how rich and how sweet their fellowship must of been, and how ours could be, if we ever got to the place where we understood our two priorities. Love and care for each other and reach the world and let everything just drop. So, and we'll go fast, 'cause we've covered that same theme so many times. The first feature then was that they really had spiritual participation. The second one, strong preaching. And this picks up kind of where we just left off. Verse 33, and we'll go back to the end of 32 in a minute. But 33 says, "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all." Boy, they had kind of a holy boldness, that just continued. The word gave is an imperfect in the greek, which means they were continuing, the word gave also has implied in it an obligation and the very word itself they were discharging a debt. The apostle Paul said, I am debtor. Remember that in Romans 1? I mean I know something the world needs. I'm a debtor. If I go down the street and I see a man's house burning down and his children are in the living room playing and they don't see the fire, I don't stand on the curb and say, my, I wish I knew them.... I'd certainly tell them.... or I've got to get down to the office and figure out a strategy to reach them, or print up some little notes that say, your house is on fire, and drop them down the chimney. You know there are so many circumventing methods. They were busy just proclaiming, you see. Busy proclaiming, strong preaching and they were giving witness it says of the resurrection, and that's the fantastic thing, because that's just what they got in trouble for doing. Back in chapter 4, verse 2, they had just been seized upon by the leaders, and the leaders were grieved that they taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. They didn't like that doctrine of resurrection. They didn't like the idea that the crucified criminal Jesus was up and alive again. And they didn't wanta hear them preaching that anymore. They forbade them to preach it, and of course that just added fuel to the fire, and away they went preaching it with all the more boldness. It's a fantas-tic thing to realize, but they never suppressed their message because it offended somebody, now mark that. So many times, we've talked about this, we worm our way around the offense, you know. You wanta hear something shocking? Do you know that a man who lives in this world without God, is an offense to God, every second of his existence? I mean if a man can live his whole existence as an open offense to God, I think we can offend that man for a moment or two, by letting him know that he is offensive to God. Now that dosen't mean you put your heel on his neck, and that doesn't mean that you offend him with your breath. That means that you offend him with the offense of the cross, and with sin, and you don't water down your message because you think it might offend. Don't you ever tone down the great doctrines of the Word of God to remove the offense. The offense better be there or there won't be anything for him to fall over, do you understand that? Do you know that in Romans, Jesus is called a rock, of what? Of offense. He must offend them at the point of their sin. And so they preached, and they were offensive to the world, but they were a sweetsmelling savor to God. So it should be. And just because they were told not to preach, they didn't stop. They had a higher command. Remember what Peter and John said, you judge whether we ought to obey men

rather than God. He told us to preach, so we'll preach. And it says at the end of verse 33, with this strong preaching going on, great grace was upon them all. The grace was unloaded on 'em. You say, what does that mean? Well, that can mean two things. The word "grace" is the same word trans-lated "favor" earlier, when it says, "and the favor of all the people was on them," so likely it means that the people couldn't resist them, they were something marvelous, something marvelous. Now the leaders hated them, but to the people initially they had a kind of a refreshing kind of flavor. I mean, I think everybody loves somebody who believes in a cause, who gives his life for it. And then to see people who loved each other like this, how could you resist that? And they found favor with the people. But I think there's another thing implied in the favor, and I think that's why it's not qualified as God's favor or the people's favor, because I think it means both. They had the favor of the people, but secondly, they had the favor of God. God was blessing them. They were so richly blessed that God was pouring out sweet favor upon the church, and let me say this, God only pours out His sweet favor on a church that has two characteristics, loving unity and evangelistic zeal. A church apart from those two things exists with limited favor from God. Great grace, watch it, great grace is reserved for the church that is one, and the church that is out after the world for Jesus Christ. No church will ever know the richness of great grace from God, apart from real loving unity and evangelistic zeal. And so, the sharing of the saints involves spiritual participation and strong preaching. And God responded with great grace.

Third thing, it also involved sharing practically. You know there's such a thing as theoretical unity, and there's such a thing as ah, sorta musical unity, we are one in the Spirit, you know, and we sing it. It's terrific. Then there's such a thing as real unity. Which may or may not be related to musical or theoretical unity. And they had the real stuff. The real stuff, and I want ya to see this, verse 32, "And the multitude of those that believed were of one heart and of one soul; (now listen) neither said any (not one person said this) that any of his things which he possessed was his own;" Nobody said, Wait a minute, that's mine, you can't have ... whata ya ... no. Nobody said that. Every-body said, Hey, all that I have belongs to all of you. You say, You mean they all said that? You say, Well who sent down those orders? Nobody. It dosen't say that Peter made an edict that all people admit that all they had was everybody's. It says this, "Neither said any of them that any of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." They all said it. They all said, Hey, whatever I have belongs to you if you need it. You see they had the right view of money and they had the right view of possessions. You know what God's view of it is? Whatever you have, in total doesn't belong to you. That's principle number one. None of it. You say, Wait a minute, I paid for it; 36 months I paid for it, right? Let me tell you something--it's not yours. It isn't yours. You say, Whose is it? It's God's, and it belongs to every other one who is His, if they need it. You say, You mean if, if, if, somebody is in need or if there's a need within the body or within the local congregation, I should sell my car and drive a Volkswagon? No, you should liquidate God's car and, ah, drive a Volkswagon or whatever. If there's any Fiat dealers here, I'm sorry for that. But you see, it's not yours to begin with. The Christian view of possessions is this, I hold what I hold in trust for God. You say, well, I thought I was only responsible to give God a tenth, that's only the stewardship part, no-no, no, no, ah, you're not responsible for the tenth, you're responsible to give God all of it. That's the point. That's the Christian

view of possessions and money, it's all His any-way, and they had it right, see? They said nothing that I have is mine it all belongs to God, and consequently it all belongs to whoever's His, who needs it. Oh, that's a terrific concept. So practical. I mean just flowing out of the love that they had for each other was a desire to just own nothing, but just share everything. Now that's real love. Your love gets just as practical as what you're willing to sacrifice, financially, uumm, that pinches, doesn't it? Sure does. I can always tell a man's spiritual depth if I happen to have the information, which I don't always have obviously, and I don't go looking around, and I haven't got any idea because I never have any, any ah, insights into who gives what to the church. I would never examine that. I want, I don't even wanta know that. But you can always tell a man's depth of love for Christ by what he sacrifices financially; that's a measure of his life, because that's where his Christianity gets right down to the real nitty gritty. You say that's a pretty mundane concept, I know, that's just the point. That's just the point. And you see, when we saw in Acts 2, the church being born, you'll remember that we saw there were alot of pilgrims that came to Jerusalem, right? And when they came to Jerusalem they hadn't any homes and they hadn't any support, and so they had a community of people who'd moved in on them who needed supply. Secondly, I'm sure they were some of those people who lost their jobs and certain things that they had for income. There were poor people all over the place in Jerusalem, and most of the believers were poor. And so the rich were able to supply the needs of those that were poor, because they didn't think that anything they owned belonged to them. That's a great concept. Whatever I have belongs to anybody who needs it, and at any moment when I know there's a need I should be able to liquidate everything I have to supply that need, and then you know what'll happen? God will reap the harvest and pour it back to me so much, I won't even be able to contain it. But I don't do it for that reason. Look at verse 34, "Neither was there any among them that lack-ed; (you know not one guy had anything that he needed? They just kept supplin') for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold." Everybody went out and said, hey, I don't need all that property over there, God's goin' take care of me and look over here, these folks they have needs, I'll just sell all that and I'll just bring it here and you guys let them meet their needs. Now that's practical Christianity, practical. Now that's not communism; it doesn't mean they sold the house they live in, it doesn't mean that they, that they gave up everything and they all became poor and doled it out on an equal basis, not at all. It means that when there were needs, they met the needs and if it meant that they had to sell their property to do it, they did it. And don't you think for a minute that God doesn't want you to have any money. God gives you all things richly to enjoy, First Timothy 6 says--and the context there is money--He's given you money 'cause it's a wonderful blessing. Now if you love it, it's goin' to mess you up, because the love of money is the root of all evil, right? Not money, and you can love it and have none of it, or you could have a whole lot of it and not love it. But it's the love of it, that's the root of all evil. Jesus put it this way and it couldn't be more simple--you cannot serve God and money. Never met a man yet who had a goal in his mind to make money who was worth much to God. You can't do it. But I never met a man who was really plugged in and Spirit-filled who didn't have his money all out on the table for anybody who needed it. It's always the way. Oh, what a wonderful attitude that early church had.

Nobody really had any needs because everybody was just pouring it in. How many churches can stand up and say, well I just wanta let ya know that nobody around here has any needs because the money's all comin' in so fast. I just think to myself what God could do if everybody got excited about that. But ya know how we respond? You know how our giving works? It works in response to plea's, you know? Instead of just the free flow of response to the grace of God. And we need to change that, I think. I mean I don't believe in gimmicks, I don't believe in begging and tearjerking, and all kinds of tricks, and things like that to get money out of people. That to me is absolutely wrong, offensive to God. I believe that your giving oughta be the free flow of a sacrificial attitude that springs out of love for God. And if it doesn't, then your money isn't worth anything to God anyway. You might as well keep it. As the Bible says, I will not give Him that which cost me nothing. And so, this church shared. Now I want ya to notice a little footnote about how they did it. Verse 35 says, "And they laid them down at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." You'll notice that they didn't run around givin' it to each other, but that they brought it into a common store, gave it to the apostles and the apostles dispensed it. That's where we have the basis or the initiat-ion really of the kind of giving we do in the church. Where the money is brought, it is placed into the hands of those who are the teaching...the pastors and elders, and they are responsible for distributing it as the needs arise.

This is New Testament; this is bibical, and I think you need to be careful, I think there are so many people who fall under the pattern of wanting to give their money only when they can determine its destiny, you know? They say, Well I want to buy that thing, or I wanta give for that thing, or I wanta give this over to this person, or they wanta pass their money out, only so that it goes where they think it oughta go. I don't think that's the truest kind of Bibical giving. Also, I think that very often in that there's the danger then of, of ah, seeking a reward on a very superficial basis, the applause of men. Whereas that secret kind of faithful giving, where you just bring it and lay it there and let it be distributed as God directs the men res-ponsible. That's the purest kind of giving. And I think that keeps you away from the danger of self satisfaction or glory in the kind of giving you do, and that's just a little footnote. But I'll tell ya, if you call yourself a Christian and your heart's not open in a financial way then somethin's wrong somewhere. James said this, "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; (which is just what he needs, a little advice, what you need is some food) notwithstanding, you give them not those things which are needful to the body, what profit is that?" Faith, if it hath not works, is what? Dead. If you say you believe but you don't open your heart to the needs of your brother, somethin's wrong somewhere. In First John 3:17, listen to this, "Who-soever hath this world's good, (you have money?) and you see his brother have need, and shut up his compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" The love of God dosen't express itself by holding back what somebody else needs, does it? God looked down at us and what did we need? Salvation. And what did He provide? Salvation. We needed grace and how much did He give us? He giveth more than we could ever use. Somebody said, Well,I give my tenth. Well, for you that might be fine, for some of you that's sin. You say, sin? That's right, be-cause if a tenth for some of you isn't a sacrifice, then it's, watch this, selfish legalism.

Selfish legalism. Money is not evil, as I said, but you can use it for God's glory or it can become a problem, and an inducer of evil. Well the early church had it right, they had the right attitude toward money. You remember what Paul said, Godliness with contentment is great gain. You wanta really be rich? Just be Godly and be happy with what you've got. That's great gain.

Alright, so Luke then gives us spiritual participation, strong preaching and sharing practically as the three insights into the posit-ive picture here. Then to kind of make this thing live a little bit, he gives us a sample person. He just pulls one guy out of the congreg-ation and says, for example, here's one who gave. And this is beautiful, because this is a man named Joseph. Now Joseph was, verse 36, by the apostles nicknamed or surnamed Barnabas. Now Barnabas means the son of consolation, encouragement or exhortation. Apparently Barnabas or Joseph had the gift of exhortation, so they just called him, son of exhortation. And he plays an important part. You remember Barnabas was the man who accompanied the apostle Paul later on in his first miss-ionary journey. Barnabas in chapter 11 verses 22 and following is giv-ing a little counsel, and it's kinda a beautiful thing to see. Apparent-ly a beloved fellow, you remember he and Paul had a little falling out over John Mark and they parted ways, 'cause Barnabas was such a loving soul, he just couldn't give up on John Mark. So apparently he was a very dear, a very precious man, and so here he is, his name is Barnabas and he was a Levite and that's interesting because the Levites were the priesty family, they couldn't own any property. You say, well how did he get this property? Well, I think it's another indication that the Old Covenant had passed away. The Old Covenant passing away, then freed the Levites from the bondage of the old law, and he had the right then to own property. And so apparently he's purchased this, now if he was a Levite he wouldn't be very wealthy 'cause a priest didn't make any money, they pretty much lived off of what other people supplied them. And so this was a big thing to him and perhaps he had saved and scrimped and all the way along to be able to have this. He was from the country of Cyprus. Well it says in 37, "Having land, he sold it, and he brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet." Isn't that interesting? That was something that probably was his whole lifetime investment, if any history of the Levites is any indic-ation. And he sold it and just said here, you do with what you want. He didn't ask to build a wall that said in eight foot letters, Barnabas bought this wall, he didn't ask for anything. He just said here it is, you do whatever you want with it, and that's the purest kind of giving you see, and it was a beautiful thing, just one man, now that's just one example outta the whole thing. He doesn't have to control the destiny of his donations, see. He says, you take care of it. You say, well is that how we're to give? Yes it is, and let me just take a little sidetrack. I think I've only preached one time, I know I have, only one time since I've been here in almost four years on giving, and I wanta refresh your mind in two or three principles, just very quickly. Now we learned this, that it should be brought and then it should be given and distributed by those who are given responsibility to dis-tribute, it should be sacrificial because it should measure our love, and we should keep in mind that our view of money is that all that we have isn't ours anyway, it's God's and it belongs to whoever needs it, and we liquidate it at any moment when there's a need. But let me take it a step further and just give you two, two or three verses that'll help ya to know how to handle your money in terms of God. First Corinthians 16:2 says this, even tells you when to give, "Upon the first

day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store." In other words, we oughta give systematically, on the first day of the week. Now you may only give on a Sunday once a month or twice a month, but it ought to be on that first day. The first day of the week so that it's systematic, so that you're constantly and faithfully giving, not spurting, periodically, but that you're constantly ever-mindful that God is the possessor of your funds, and that weekly kind of giving does that, just refreshes you in the conscienceness that God owns everything you have, and it keeps you in a constant attitude of giving, of giving, of giving, mindful that what you don't give is still God's also and to be spent wisely. So, and how much do you give? You give as God has prospered. Maybe you can only give a tenth be-cause you don't have much, maybe you can give 40% 'cause you have a lot. Then he says, do that, so that when I get there, there aren't going to be any special offerings. We don't need any project offerings, you just make sure if everybody's giving systematically and sacrifically, you'll have enough to take care of the needs when I get there. And so it should be done that way. Now Second Corinthians chapter nine, even takes us a little bit further. You say, well how much should I give? Well, this is a beautiful thing, that's between you and God, not between you and the church. You're not supposed to sign a little thing and pass it into Peter, he doesn't say that. He says in chapter 9 verse 7, he says this, "Every man according as he purposes in his heart." He doesn't say write it down and pass it in. He says just do it in your heart. You get down on your knees with God, and say God, I wanta give sacrificially and I want it to be the measure of my love and I want to do it the systematically, week-by-week--now You show me what I oughta do. And don't do it grudgingly, and don't do it because you have to do it, because God loves what kind of giver? Just a cheerful giver; just do it because you want to. That was the spirit of the Macedonians, they took a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem and they were terrific people, they really got excited about an opport-unity like that. It says in verse 3 of chapter 8, Second Corinthians, "For to their power, I bear witness, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves." Isn't that good? Nobody talked 'em into it, nobody got up and gave a tearjerking plea, nobody told a sad story, nobody pulled a gimmick or did this. They just, they did it because they wanted to do it. They did it all of themselves. That's really the only reason for giving. In verse 9, he says this, no verse 8 he says, "I speak not by commandment [I'm not commanding you to give]. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, for your sakes He became poor, that through His poverty you might be rich." And if that's not enough to make you give, I'm not goin' stand here and command you to give. So Barnabas gave from love out of a pure heart, just for the blessedness of giving. And he's only a sample of a whole lot of others who did the same thing, in that early church and that's the sharing of the saints.

Secondly, and this narrative is so simple, we'll just go through it. The sins of the saints. It's simple in presentation, it's tragic in every other way. Let's look at the contrast. What a beautiful backdrop in 32 to 37, but oh, the sad, foreground. The sins of the saints. As generous and sacrificial and selfless as those saints were, and as they were giving out of love and a beautiful unity, right in the middle of that spawned by the giving itself was the seeds of sin and deceit. The story of Ananias is to the Book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the Book of Joshua. For both those deceitful acts interr-upted the

victorious progress of the people of God. And Ananias is a New Testament Achan. Giving, in chapter 4 was a response to the Spirit--filled life. Then chapter 5, it's a response to a Satan-filled life. Big difference. Let's look at four features of it. Number one, sinful pre-tense, verse one, "But [and there's a wealth of transistion in that word, but, in contrast to dear Barnabas] a certain man named Ananias [that means the Lord is gracious] and Sapphira [which means beautiful]." They were gracious and beautiful but their deed was ugly) his wife, sold a possession." Now they had some property so they sold it. You say, oh, that's nice, yeah that is very nice. But verse 2 tells you what's not so nice. "And kept back part of the price, his wife also knowing of it, (she can't plead ignorance) and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet." Now you say, well what is this? Well, let me give ya the story, what's happening is this. In the early church these people were doing this, and when they would sell something they would bring all of the money and place it there, so they were giving everything, they were laying, as the song says, all on the altar. So Ananias and Sapphira thought, Ah-ha, here's our chance. We'd like to get a little spiritual prestige, plus we'd like to make a few bucks. They had two problems: they wanted self glory and they wanted money, and they saw a way to get both. Say, we're going to sell our land and give the money to the Lord. They sold the land, pwuttt! Split the money. Gave half to the Lord under the pretense that that was the whole price, pocketed the rest, they win both ways, right? They get the spiritual esteem of the saints and they get a little cash along with it. Can't miss. That was their sinful pretense. And so they did it, and they came and they laid it at the apostles' feet. You know, in all of their piousity, pretense. Now what is the sin here? Let's look at it now. The sin is not that they didn't give everything, God didn't ask them to give everything; there's no command to give everything. God never demanded that. God never even told them to sell that prop-erty; that was voluntary. All giving in the New Testament is voluntary. You say, Well was the sin that they kept back some for themselves; was it the sin of selfishness? Not really. That was a sin; that's part of it, but that in itself is not sin--to have some money, God gives us money. You're not supposed to sell everything and live like a pauper, God doesn't tell us that. You say, Well, what was the sin? Well, on the surface--watch it--the physical action was a lie. You see, they had vowed to the Holy Spirit and publicly in front of the congregation that they were going to sell this thing and give it all to the Lord. That was the physical action; it was a lie, they lied to God and to men, and ah, that's really what Peter says at the end of verse 4, is that you didn't only lie to men, but you lied to God. So they just put a big lie on. That was really the physical act sin, but behind every physical act sin, watch this, is a mental attitude sin, and the mental attitude sin was, was the secret sin, you know like Lewis Sperry Chafer says, secret sin on earth is open scandal in heaven. They thought they were sneaky. And the mental attitude sin was this, hypocrisy based on a desire for spiritual status. I'll say it again, hypocrisy based on a desire for spiritual status. You see they wanted to be elevated in the minds of everybody else, spiritually, they wanted everybody to think they were super spiritual. And they believed that they would be applau-ded for sacrifice and they could save a little cash at the same time. They sought to gain prestige, to be thought of as Godly people. They thought a little high prestige would come from a little low giving. And the lie was superficial, you see, the lie was only the vehicle they used to attempt to carry out the covetness hypocrisy for a spiritual status. Hypocrisy was the

dirty sin, hypocrisy was the mental attitude sin, the core sin, creating the impression they were giving all, and they were really pious, and they were really spiritual. And dear ones, this is Satan's initial move to the inside, to corrupt the church, the sin of hypocrisy among Christians. And you know something? That's the sin that God hates worse than any other sin. In the New Testament, God condemns sin, He condemns sin, He condemns sin, and He always loves the sinner, you know? He always loves the sinner, until He gets to the hypocrites and He condemns them along with their sin. He hates hypocr-isy above all sins, above all sins.

Now, it's, it's wrong for Ananias and Sapphira to be selfish and want money, that's a sin. It's wrong for them not to give sacrificially, that's a sin. It's wrong to lie, that's a sin, but deeper and more devastating, is to be desirous of self glory and to stoop to spiritual hypocrisy and lie to the Holy Spirit, to feign being spiritual, when you're carnal to the core. That's the most insidious sin. I put it this way, none is so ugly in God's eyes as one who paints spiritual beauty, where there is none. And they are the ones that wormed their way into the church and they were believers, and then they look so spiritual and they wear the robes and they put on the facade and they get exalted to places of responsibility and that puts Satan in certain controlling areas. And this is the thing that is a struggle for all pastors, throughout all the years of the church since Peter himself. To find the hypocrites, to sort out the tares, not only the unbelievers, but then after you've gotten rid of the tares to try and find the weak that is hypocritical. Now I'm talking about believers. You say, well there are hypocrites in the church, sure there are, we've got 'em right here at Grace Commuinty Church, 13248 Roscoe Blvd. Panorama City, they're right here. They're right-, they're some of you, hypocrites. Feigning spiritually that you don't have. You're not even real, you're a Christ-ian yes, but your spiritual life is carnal, but we think it's spiritual because you've got a front you wear and so maybe some of you are in positions of responsibility and the sad tragedy of that is that there-fore Satan is using you. You say you're talking pretty serious, well that's right, because I know how God feels about this, this is His church, this is the church that Jesus bought with His own precious blood, and it's too priceless a thing and too expensive a commodity to fool around with and, God hates sin in the church, if for no other reason than just for the fact of what it cost Him to buy His church. Can you imagine how it must grieve His heart when He sees the carnal ingratitude of believers who would be a part of the grace of God in His church and act in a carnal fashion, and put on a facade of spirit-uality to gain prestige and to gain positions of leadership and then be Satan's tool. Even believers to do that, sad. Listen, we need to have a quiet kind of Godliness that is not self seeking, it is not under the guise of some spirituality that we don't have. God, I pray-ed this week that God would help me to never preach to seek self glory or to ever put on a facade of spirituality that isn't there, but to be genuine and real, and I pray the same for you.

In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus painted this whole picture of hypocrisy like it is. In verse 1, He says this, (now listen to this) "Take heed that you do not your alms before men, (don't give, that's giving, fin-ancial giving) to be seen by them; otherwise you have no reward of your Father, who is in heaven." If you give just so you can tell other people you give or so somebody can see that you give, you don't

have any reward from God at all. Don't do your alms before men. "Therefore when you do thine alms, don't sound a trumpet (dum-da-da, here he comes, to give again, no place for that) as the hypocrites do in the synagogu-es and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." Glory from men, not God. When you do your alms, don't even let your left hand know what your right hand does, and do it in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. You do open giving and you're going to get no res-ponse. You do secret giving and you're going to get open response, from God. And when you pray, don't be like the hypocrites, they love to pray standing in the synagogue, and on the street corner. Oohhh, God, you know, so-forth and so-on. Remember what it says, the Pharisee and the Publican prayed and the Pharisee said to himself, he was prayin' to himself, I'm sure God wasn't listening. He says, he prayed with him-self saying, dear self, you know, and publicly so everyone could hear, and the Publican bowed his head low to the ground and wept before God. That's a trouper. He says, they love to pray standing in the synagogues and the corners of the street, and He says they have their reward. What is it? They get to pray standing in the street, that's it. But thou when thou prayest go in your room and when you're in there, shut the door and pray to God who's in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. I dare say that some people never have any kind of a prayer life, except that which is done before other people. It's all a pretense. And don't use vain repetition, just words for vocabulary drill for the sake of your audience. Then He goes on to say this, listen to verse 16, "Moreover when you fast, don't be like the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; (you could always tell when they were fasting, 'cause they looked kind of sick, you know) they disfigured their faces, (put a little white under your eyes, and somethin', you know) Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. (they get to look sick) But thou, when thou fastest, anoint (wash your)---He says, Put your make-up on and wash your face. Look sharp when you're fasting. Why? "That thou may appear not to be fasting." But God, who's in secret will see it and reward you openly. Now see, there's something about a pretentious life that is nauseating to God. Especially so in a Christian's experience. So sinning saints, feigning holiness--that's Ananias and Sapphira--and God hates it. It's sick.

So then, there's not only sinful pretense but there's spiritual perception, watch, how Peter under the inspiration of the Spirit of God sees the issue, verse 3, and oh, you can just imagine the shock that hit Ananias. He comes up there you know, he's put all of his money, this is what we sold the land for and he's waiting for you know, clapping to go, and oh, and then, what a spiritual giant that Ananias, boy, and he gets up there and Peter says, verse 3, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold was it not in thy power? (you could do what you wanted with it) Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." Now that must have been the shock of all shocks. That poor guy. He came up there waiting for the approval of the people. And you know in most cases today in the church he would have gotten it. Heard 'em say, oh Ananias, such a generous fellow. And Peter would have thought in his mind, oh Lord, I'm getting the revelation that the guy's a liar, but listen Lord, I mean half of the price is better than nothin'. I mean we could use the money. Plus this guy keeps the shekells comin' week by week, you know he's a part of the thing

here, and I don't know whether we can make it without the guy, and I mean he's a pretty good guy, I mean it's a little thing, you know, we can work with him and love, we need to love him in-to the fold a little bit, Lord and just kind of, well, Ananias, there's a little area where you can probably work on, and you know, and ah, we could say, we could at least tell the people, it's so generous of Anan-ias to do this, wonderful fellow. No, Ananias right in front of the whole congregation, why have you lied to the Holy Spirit? Filled with Satan, you are. Now, that's a powerful confrontation. So powerful; Ananias dropped dead--on the spot. I want you to notice verse 3, it says and Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled thine heart?" The word for filled is *pleroo*, it means complete occupation, it is the same word used of demon possession. It is used in chapter 4, verse 31, of being filled with the Spirit. You say, can Satan fill a Christian? It says he did in chapter 5, verse 3. You say, well wait a minute, I didn't think Satan could fill a Christian because, greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world, yes, Satan cannot fill a Christian, he cannot get into a Christian, unless that Christian willfully opens his life by protracted sin and deceit against God. And then you better believe he can. And you'll notice that he puts the responsibility not on Satan, but on Ananias in verse 2, ah, verse 3, he says Peter says, why? why? In verse 4, in the middle of the verse, why? He's saying Ananias, this isn't necessary, why did you open your heart to Satan in this sinful way? And you see the thing here is this people, a Christian does not need to fear Satan, a Christian does not need to fear that Satan is going to move into his life. He can't do that, none of his demons can do that. But I'll tell ya one thing, you better fear, if you begin to live a deceitful wicked life, because you open the door to Satan. And they were corrupt, they were money hungry, they were glory seekers, they were liars, they were hypocrites, and that's enough soil for Satan to plant himself. Even though they were believers. And so then, Satan had filled them, and they lied to the Holy Spirit, they vowed that they would give all. You say, boy, I would never vow that, and then not do it. Did you ever give your whole life to Christ? Did you ever say that to Him, Lord, I commit everything to You? Did you do it? Have you kept back some? Nothin' new under the sun, friends. You say, well am I glad I wasn't alive in that chapter. You know this is a serious thing people, we say that, oh, Ananias, what a terrible guy Ananias is. How many times have you said, Lord, if You'll bring an extra check in I'll give it to You, and then split it with Him? How many times have you done that? How many times have you said, Lord, if I just get a little more money, I'll give more, and you got more and you didn't give more. You just did what Ananias did, no different. How many times have you said, God, I'm going to commit my life to You, I'm goin' to serve You, and then you didn't do it? Just what Ananias did. You lied. Maybe you did it in a pretentious way, like Ananias, maybe not. But he did it, and he didn't have to. It was his own in verse 4, he says, he didn't even have to sell it, but you sold it and it was still in your power, you could've done what you wanted, Satan didn't make you do this. You can't say the devil made me do it, Flip Wilson, not withstanding, that's not the issue. That's not the issue at all, the issue is why did you do it? You did it. The only way Satan ever can get involved with a Christian, is when a Christian willfully per-mits him. And you lied not unto men, no, no, Ananias, you were lyin' to God. Notice one little footnote, Holy Spirit in verse 3, you lied to the Holy Spirit. Verse 4, you lied to God. Great proof that the Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit is not some floating fog or some influence or some ghost, like

Casper the friendly, who's sort of innocuous, He is God. And you'll notice also another footnote, that all sin in a Christian's life is against the Holy Spirit. Because all Christians are the temple of what? Of the Holy Spirit, and whenever you sin, you are sinning against the Holy Spirit. Directly against Him.

Alright, so we see sinful pretense, spiritual perception, then swift punishment, verse 5, "And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down, and died." Breathed his last, dropped dead, that was it, bang and he was dead. You say, how did he die? I'll tell ya how he died. He died by judicial act of God's judgement. You say, well what were the physical causes? I think the shock of the whole thing just stopped his heart, right then. I think his conscience was so struck with the horror of what Peter had just said that he just stopped living. English history records for us the account of the Dean of Saint Paul's who went in to see Edward the First, and Edward the First was so mad, he looked at him with a glare that struck him so hard that he fell over dead. Now if Edward the First can do that, I think God can do it. And I think God just brought to the attention of Ananias such a flagrant, blatant act of sin at such a shocking moment of time and he was so discovered, that instead of having to go out and kill himself, he just stopped his heart, dead. In sheer fear and terror. It's a sad thing. You say, does God always punish like that? Does God actually kill Christians? Yes, He does. Not always though, but He does. You say, you mean that God would actually take the life of a Christian? Yes. You say, What gives you belief in that? I'll tell you, it's simple; it's right in the Word of God. And if the Bible says it, I believe it, and as somebody said, that settles it. First Corinthians 11, and you listen well, talking about communion, the Lord's Table, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgement to himself." You come to the table of the Lord as a Christian and your heart's not pure, you're com-ing and you're going to eat and you're going to do it unworthily, unless your heart is clean and there's no open sin in your life. Listen, he says some of you are doing this and, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." I've actually taken the lives of some of you Corinthians because of the way you come to the Lord's Table. Let me give you another one. It's First John 5:16 says this, "If any man sees his brother (Christian) sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it." You say, what is the sin unto death? It's that last sin that a sinning believer commits when God says, that's it, I've had it, you're comin' home. It's the straw that broke the camel's back, and sometimes a Christian lives in sin, and God finally just says, I'm sorry, that's all, and takes him outta the world. That's ultimate discipline. Let me show you one other passage, maybe you never thought of it in this light, but I read it to you in this light. James 1:18, "Of His own will begot He us (he says) with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures." God begot us, to be a living example to the world of what His creatures oughta be, you see? We're to be examples, that's why He saved us and left us here, now watch, verse 21, well verse 19, let's go right through it, "Wherefore, my beloved brethern, (now to whom is he speaking when he uses those words, Christians or non-Christians? Christians, he says my beloved brethern) let every man be swift to hear, and slow to speak, and slow to wrath; For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. (listen) Wherefore, (here you are beloved brethern, God has called you to be examples, so do this) put away filthiness overflowing of wickedness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which

is able to save your souls." Do Christians need to do something to have their souls saved? No, that's a problem isn't it? It's not a problem if you understand the Greek word for "souls" is also the word for *lives*. You know what he's saying? Put the wickedness out of your life, put the filthiness out of your life, receive the Word, or you'll die. That's what he's saying. That's how strong God spoke in the early church. If you want to save your lives, ya better get into the Word and put away the filthiness. Now that's serious stuff. You say, God's serious about it, isn't He? Yes He's serious about it. He didn't redeem this church to make it a mockery. He redeemed it so that it might be a light in the world, and we have fouled it up for so long that God's heart must be broken. Verse 6 says, "And the young men arose, wrapped him up, and carried him out, and buried him." And they had to take him outside the city, and it apparently took about three hours because verse 7 says, "It was about the space of three hours when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in." Here comes his wife, expecting to get in on the laurels. "An.d Peter (responded to her or) answered her, and said tell me whether you sold the land for so much." In other words, he pointed to the money there and said, is this the price you sold it for, this is it? She said, yes that's it. Liar. That's another diliberate lie, she lied. "And then Peter (again) said to her, (verse 9) How is it that ye have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?" Oh fools, he says. Have you decided that you'd put God to the test to see if He could discover hypocrisy? You think you've deceived God? Oh, that is stupid. And verse 9 says, "Behold, the feet of them who have buried your hus-band are at the door, and shall carry you out." At that point they were arriving from the burial. And verse 10. "Then fell she down imm-ediately at his feet, right there (where the money was piled up) and died; and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband." Listen God is serious about the sins of the saints. He is serious, and this was a lesson to that church, of what God's attitude is toward the sins of believers. God was saying this, mark it well, I am not playing church, this is dead serious, the church is no social gig. This is dead serious. And don't you believe that there was one fast examination of attitudes goin' on that day. I imagine there was some weeping and some heart-grieving before God, and some hearts getting right, if there was any wrong. And that's the last point. Sinful pretense led to spiritual perception, which led to swift punishment, which led to solemn purging, Verse 5, at the end, "And great fear came on all them that heard these things (verse 11) And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." They got right, right then, snap, that fast. And you know what happened as a result? Verse 12--miracles and wonders. Verse 14, and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes of men and women. When the church gets pure, the world gets saved. Did you get it?

Oh, there are lessons here, what are they? God hates sin. Especi-ally sins in Christians' lives. Second, God punishes sin. First Peter 4:17, says Judgement must begin at the house of God. And if God cares about the sins of the saints that much and punishes them that strigent-ly, I say to you who are unbelievers, beware of the judgement of God upon you. And so we see lessons, powerful, speaking to our hearts. I pray God, that this church will be pure, that you'll examine your heart as I have mine, that we might be what God would want us to be.

Let's pray, Father we thank You for such clear Word of truth, and Lord we know that You can take now these thoughts from the text and make the application. We did not have time to do that, Lord. We want You to do it. God, we just want to live the pure life; we want to be the pure church. We know You died and redeemed Your church not to be unholy and not to take things lightly and not to laugh away the Christ-ian life and not to make it to be something social, but God to take it as dead serious business. God help us to love each other in a pure unity and help us to be desirous of reaching the world. Help us to hold nothing as our own, but to hold it all open to those who need it. Help us to know how to give the right way. Help us not to be hypocrit-ical, to be honest and not to lie to the Spirit. O, God, all these things and whatever sins may be in our lives, remove them from us, that we might be a pure church, that the world might be reached for Jesus Christ. O, thank You for what You can do if our hearts are right, in Christ's name, Amen.

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