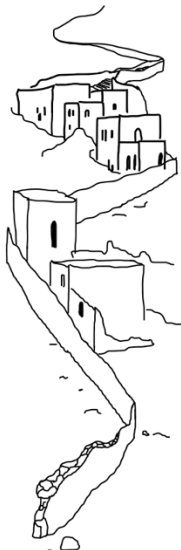




1. Observe the context: Note that verses 32-35 all begin with conjunctions, a part of speech which joins words, phrases, or clauses, and indicates the relationship between them. “And” and “for” connect what comes after with what has been written before. Briefly review what has happened in chapter 4 prior to verse 32.
2. What effects from the prior events in chapter 4 are recorded in verses 32-35? Discuss what it means when it says in v. 32 that the believers “were of one heart and soul.” Describe what you think it must have been like to live within that community of believers, at that time.
3. The preaching in verse 33 seems to be connected to the generosity expressed in verses 32 and 34. How do our priorities and the way we live our lives affect our testimony for Jesus? Can you share an experience where you sacrificed something of significant value for someone else, or someone else sacrificed for you?
4. What does the Bible teach about owning or having property? (See: Genesis 23:16-18 and 33:18-20; Exodus 20:15, 17 with Ephesians 4:28; and Acts 5:4a.)
5. In verse 36, Joseph has apparently lived in such a way that he had a reputation for encouraging others. How do you think he earned his nickname of “Barnabas”? What kind of reputation would you like to have before others? What actions do you need to take to move in that direction?
6. In chapter 5:1-5, what was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? What does it mean to “lie to the Holy Spirit”? Why was this act so serious? How do you think Peter knew about their sin? What do you think would have happened if Peter had not confronted this couple on their sin?
7. Why do you think God dealt so severely with Ananias and Sapphira? What was the result of how God dealt with Ananias and Sapphira? (See verses 11-14.)
8. Do we see hypocrisy in the church today? Give an example without naming names. What do you think would happen if God acted today as He did with Ananias and Sapphira? What should we do if we observe hypocrisy in our own lives?
9. What do you think people who heard of this incident, who were not part of the church, thought about these believers and their God? (See verse 13.)
10. The actions of the early church were based on their understanding of who Jesus is and how much He had done to save them from hell. How can we continually develop our love for our Lord Jesus and show appreciation for what He has done for us? How can we personally grow in our love for and unity with each other?



Sacrifice and Sin in the Church Leader Notes for Acts 4:32-5:16



The first four chapters of Acts tell the story of the church of God coming into existence and acting through the power of the Holy Spirit. Powerful preaching, dynamic unity and love, and dramatic growth are hallmarks of this period. Last week we witnessed the church experience its first taste of resistance from the outside world. They faced the situation with boldness and great faith, confounding even the religious leaders who sought to silence them. In our passage this week, we'll see the impact this had on the believers and how they lived their lives in sacrificial unity and love. We'll also witness their first clash with enemies from within their own number.

In the final six verses of chapter 4 we see the effects of what has happened earlier. Going through this early resistance to the gospel seemed to bind the believers together so that they were of "one heart and soul." This means there was such unity and love between them, that they seemed inseparable. In verses 32 and 34, spontaneous and sacrificial generosity seemed to break out among the congregation. This contributed to powerful and effective preaching of the gospel with an emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus Christ (v. 33). Sacrifices being made within the church gave it a powerful impact on people watching from the outside. What must it have been like to live among a community of people who willingly sacrificed anything they had to meet your need? Regarding private property ownership, which had existed in the Bible at least since the time of Abraham, keep in mind that the goal was not equality between all the saints, but to meet practical needs as they arose. They didn't give up the idea of private property ownership, but were so changed by the gospel that their hearts readily looked for ways to be a blessing to others around them. The fact that they were willing to sell their property to help with the needs of people they had only recently met, underscored how they were living the rest of their lives in a sacrificial and generous way. In verse 36, Joseph is given as an example of such generosity. He lived in such a way that he earned the nickname of "Barnabas", son of encouragement. Imagine what it would take for us to earn a reputation like that!

In contrast, chapter 5 begins with the story of Ananias and Sapphira, a married couple who conspired in a scheme to make themselves look more devoted than they actually were. Their sin of hypocrisy was so serious because they lied to the Holy Spirit and used the public ministry as their platform. It was done in front of the apostles and all the saints in blatant disregard of the holiness and purity which was being developed by the Holy Spirit. In lying to Peter and essentially to the church, they were really lying to the Holy Spirit, who was working to keep the church pure from sin and was at that moment seeking to save them from judgment by convicting them not to follow through on their plan. Ananias and Sapphira did not listen. It seems the Holy Spirit informed Peter what was going on, and he confronted Ananias and Sapphira individually. We don't know if Peter knew what would happen when he confronted Ananias, but he didn't seem surprised when it happened. He certainly knew what was going to happen when Sapphira walked in and he confronted her. Notice that Peter only confronted them with their sin and asked them why they would lie to the Holy Spirit. The judgment came directly from God Himself; this was not a case of church discipline, where the offender is called to repentance and restoration. Death does not allow room for that to happen. If this flagrant, public sin had not been addressed, not only would Ananias and Sapphira continue in hypocrisy and grow worse, but others would be encouraged to live hypocritically. It wouldn't be long before the church lost much of its power and testimony. This in turn would jeopardize the preaching of the gospel, leaving the lost without a testimony. Praise the Lord for godly leaders willing to do the hard work of confronting sin in the church!

(continued)

Leader Notes for Acts 4:32-5:16, continued

The Lord used this judgment of sin to teach a mighty lesson to the entire church. It resulted in what is described in verse 11 as “great fear” coming over the church and over all who heard these things. They saw what God thought about hypocrisy and lying to the Holy Spirit. It even generated fear and respect on the part of unbelievers who heard the story such that in verse 13, many of them did not dare to be around the believers. Anyone who spent time with a group like this seemed to be risking their life. Unbelievers may not have understood it, but they did respect it. The willingness of the church to purify themselves from sin in their midst resulted in many signs and wonders taking place among the people, as well as a tremendous sense of unity as they met together in Solomon’s portico. And not everyone chose to stay away from the church, since we read in verse 14 that multitudes of men and women were constantly added to their number. The church had a powerful testimony among the people, and Peter was so respected that it was thought that if his shadow fell on any sick person, that person would be healed. We read in verse 16 that word spread out to other cities about what was going on in the church in Jerusalem. What an encouragement and challenge to us modern-day believers, to be so caught up in living for our resurrected and soon-coming Savior, and in serving and loving His people, that our testimony of Christ-like love draws the unsaved to a place where they believe the gospel and are saved!