

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

THE CHURCH ON MISSION

THE SPIRIT WHO EMPOWERS

The Spirit of Truth and Generosity

As we continue our focus on the ‘church on mission’ today’s scripture will remind us that our generosity towards others expresses the love of God. Jesus said in **John 13:35 (ESV)** ³⁵ *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” And that is exactly what occurred among the believers in the early church – they loved each other and were generous. Aristides was an eloquent Athenian philosopher and a disciple of Christ who presented a statement concerning early Christian behavior to the Roman Emperor Hadrian. He said, “They love one another. They never fail to help widows. They save orphans from those who will hurt them. If they have something, they give it freely to the man who has nothing. If they see a stranger they take him home, and are happy as though he were a real brother. They don’t consider themselves brothers or sisters in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit in God.” **1 John 4:20 (ESV)** ²⁰ *If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.*

Jesus said on the night before His death in **John 17:11 (ESV)** ¹¹ *And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.* Gordon Conwell Seminary in 2010 did a research survey finding that there are 41,000 different denominations taking the name of Christ in the world. Yet, Jesus made it plain that unity in the body of Christ is a critical element to the success of His ‘body of believers.’

I want to paraphrase something that an old man told Jim Cymbala pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle when he was first starting out. It goes like this. The old man said: “You’re going to meet three types of people in your ministry. (1) The ‘pastor people’ – those who say, ‘My pastor is the best pastor in the world, and there’s nobody like my pastor. You want to come and hear my pastor!’ (2) Next is the ‘church people’ either local church people or those stuck on one particular denomination. They say, ‘There’s no church (or denomination) like my church (or my denomination).’ (3) The third type of people is ‘Kingdom people’ – people who are passionate for the Kingdom of God, for the Body of Christ. Wherever you hang your hat, or if you don’t have one to hang for that matter, you’re passionate for God’s people, for the whole unified Body of Christ - and you love them!” It is the Holy Spirit within us that gives us that immediate and lasting connection with other believers no matter what the name of their church happens to be. I love it when that happens!!! I found a little verse concerning our unity in Christ.

I don’t care what church you belong to, just as long as for Calvary you stand. If your sins have been washed in the Fountain, you’re my brother, so give me your hand’.

The Spirit strengthens the church in unity and generosity.

Read Acts 4:32-35 (ESV) 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.* 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.* 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.*

When the Holy Spirit came upon the 120 at Pentecost, they spoke in other languages preaching the gospel of Jesus. After Peter and John's release from prison for healing the lame man, they were commanded by the Jewish rulers to remain silent. Peter and John went to their companions and told them what happened. We might expect that they would pray for protection but instead they prayed for holy boldness to the point of the place where they gathered was shaken! The Holy Spirit had come upon these people. They were all filled immediately with the Spirit. Keep in mind that while we are only baptized once with the Spirit we should be **filled** on many occasions – most especially for ministry.

Amidst the persecution of believers, the church joined together in love to boldly proclaim the cause of Christ. A part of their boldness was found in their sharing with one another.

Still in our world today, we see the evidence of what Christianity has done such as hospitals, disaster and hunger relief organizations, homeless shelters, clothing and basic needs providers, etc. Our Arkansas Baptist Disaster Relief Team has done mighty works in the name of the Lord recently. On the flip side, those who stand against Christ find much to complain about often because of the actions of individuals. As believers we need to remain on guard that our words and our actions do not harm the cause of Christ.

Now, back to having all things in common! The practice in the early church was the best method for reaching people in their times. The scripture is not saying that we should collectively sell all our property and lay the money at the pastor's feet. However, the principles of freely sharing and meeting needs should always be evidenced within any church family.

Since the distribution was made to each as he had need, shows that it was only the needy who were recipients, and that there was no equalization of property. And by the way, the Jerusalem church was not set up to subsidize people who could work but did not. **Ephesians 4:28 (ESV)** ²⁸ *Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.*

The Jerusalem Christians would not let a brother or sister in Christ suffer when others had plenty. The early church was able to share possessions and property as a result of the unity brought by the Holy Spirit working in and through the believers who shared one heart and one soul.

The Spirit distinguishes between generous and greedy giving. We will read about a generous giver first.

Read Acts 4:36-37 (ESV) 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.

Barnabas is the man who would later introduce Saul of Tarsus (Paul) to the Jerusalem church and went on a missionary trip with him. They eventually had a difference of opinion concerning a young man named Mark. It is interesting to note that Barnabas was from the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe. When the Israelites came into the Promised Land, the tribe of Levi did not receive a portion of the land. **Deuteronomy 10:9 (ESV)** ⁹ Therefore Levi has no portion or inheritance with his brothers. The LORD is his inheritance, as the LORD your God said to him.) Perhaps the Old Testament law applied only in Palestine and the property was in Cyprus where Barnabas lived, or perhaps the religious leaders had become lax in enforcing the law. Possibly Barnabas' Levite background made him want to give his land back to the Lord since coming to know Christ, he realized that the Lord was his inheritance. But, I tend to believe Barnabas was generous giver because of his Holy Spirit nature of being an encourager. Giving whether it is financially or of our time is always a way to encourage others.

Now, let's move to the greedy giver!

Read Acts 5:1-6 (ESV) 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. 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." ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

Ananias liked what he has seen Barnabas do but he did not want to go that far himself. He along with Sapphira decided to emulate Barnabas for show. Theirs was a sin of premeditation assuming no one would know the difference. They forgot that the Lord sees into our hearts. God knew that Barnabas was motivated by the Holy Spirit to give, God also knew that Ananias and Sapphira were motivated by an unholy spirit to lie and they ended up receiving severe judgment instead of the acclaim they desired.

The LORD is to be obeyed in every detail. In the Old Testament we see incidences revealing that God is not to be deceived. For example, (1) The sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, offered strange fire before the LORD and were consumed by the fire. (2) According to the law, the Ark of the Covenant was only to be carried on the priests' shoulders. Uzzah died when he touched the Ark for the purpose of steadying it on a

cart. (3) Achan was disobedient to the orders of God to not take anything from the plunder of Jericho when he took a Babylonian garment. The Israelites' next battle was lost and Achan along with his family were stoned to death for their sin. These punishments remind us that God hates sin. The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira are examples of God's swift judgment in the New Testament.

The Spirit judges and purifies the church.

Read Acts 5:7-11 (ESV) ⁷ *After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.* ⁸ *And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much."* 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.* ¹¹ *And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.*

Ananias and Sapphira used a holy thing of God for the purpose of telling a lie about themselves and the Holy Spirit provided Peter with the discernment to recognize their deceit. The Holy Spirit was doing wonderful things in the hearts and lives of people. The church was pure and holy. But suddenly we find the first recorded instance of people using the church, the Holy Spirit, and the holy things of God, for their own agenda and purpose. In this case, Ananias and Sapphira were counterfeiting the work of the movement of the Holy Spirit to promote themselves as being highly spiritual and generous when, in fact, they were greedy and selfish.

Up until this time, the signs and wonders performed by the apostles had been miracles of mercy. This time we see a miracle of judgment. A New Testament example of why we should fear God even though He is a God of love! There was no sin in selling the field or keeping part of the money or even all of it. The sin was in lying to the Holy Spirit.

Keep in mind that the Spirit of God in Peter revealed the sin to Peter. Peter did not cause this couple to die. God did. Just as Peter did not heal the lame beggar – God did.

We might think, "Well, God wouldn't do anything like that today," I personally do not want to put myself in a position of finding out what God might or might not do concerning my disobedience. This event in **Acts 5** is a testament to the truth of God's Word. **Galatians 6:7 (ESV)** ⁷ *Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.* All around us we see people mocking God – denying Jesus His Son as being the only way to heaven. We know the Truth. Let's stay on mission for the Lord and trust His Holy Spirit to protect our work for Him no matter what man tries to do! Our God reigns!