

A CONTINUING WORK OF GRACE (5:12-16)

¹² The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ¹³ No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. ¹⁵ As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. ¹⁶ Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

1. How did God's judgment of Ananias and Sapphira impact the larger community's view of the church?
2. How do you reconcile Luke's statement, "no one else dared join them" with "more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number?"
3. How are the "signs and wonders" the apostles are performing a picture of God's far greater work in our life through the gospel?



I love Luke's description of the early church. "God's grace was... powerfully at work in them all (Acts 4.32)" Not just in the apostles. Not just in a few of the more serious types or the spiritual types. But, "God's grace was... powerfully at work in them all." When I read a line like that, I want to know more. What would it look like for God's grace to be powerfully at work in us?

"The apostles were preaching the resurrection of Christ with great power." Jesus continued to perform signs and wonders through them. But Luke's eye is drawn to a far deeper, but no less spectacular, work of grace. The believers are holding their possessions loosely. Rather than hanging on to their stuff, they are giving it up for others.

In order to do Luke's line justice, we need to let him continue his thought. He tells us, "And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them (vv. 33-34)."

The Old Testament ideal was being fulfilled in the life of the early church. For Luke the most powerful evidence of God's grace in the early church was their unflinching generosity.

GRACE IN THE LIFE OF EARLY CHURCH (4:32-35)

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

1. What are some of the evidences that God's grace was powerfully at work in the early church?

2. How would you describe the early church's attitude toward material wealth?
3. How would you describe our attitude toward material wealth?
4. Why do you think Luke zeros in on their attitude toward their possessions as a particularly powerful sign of God's grace at work in them?
5. What would it look like if God's grace was powerfully at work in us?

GRACE IN THE LIFE OF BARNABAS (4:36)

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

1. What do you think it means to be "a son of encouragement?"
2. How do you think Joseph earned his nickname?
3. What are some practical ways we can be "sons and daughters of encouragement?"

AN IMMINENT THREAT TO GRACE (5:1-11)

^{5:1} Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ² With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?

What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

⁵ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶ Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

⁹ Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

¹⁰ At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

1. How would you describe the church's overall attitude toward money and possessions (v. 4)?
2. How exactly would you describe Ananias and Sapphira's sin?
3. What are some ways we are guilty of the same sin?
4. Why do you think God judges this particular sin so immediately and so severely?
5. Why does Peter describe them as lying to the Holy Spirit and God rather than lying to church, or lying to him?
6. What does this passage teach us about God's attitude toward sin?
7. How is God's attitude toward sin markedly different from ours?
8. How would you describe the fear that "seized the whole church?"
9. What do you think it means to have a healthy "fear of God?"
10. How would you describe an unhealthy "fear of God?"
11. How would you describe the difference between "God's temporal judgment" and "God's eternal judgment?"
12. Is it possible to undergo "temporal judgment" without experiencing "eternal judgment?"