

³² 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. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ 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, ³⁵ and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

³⁶ And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ 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. ² 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. ³ 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? ⁴ 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."

⁵ Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. ⁶ And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*.

⁷ Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?"

She said, "Yes, for so much."

⁹ 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." ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

Introduction

When Doctor Luke recorded an account of the early Church he didn't leave out the difficult parts which would have been a challenge both to investigate and report on.

Luke teaches us in this passage that God had a commitment to root out sin in the Churches earliest days. As we will discover in a moment the first recorded sin in the new covenant community concerns a sin over a wealth issue.

One Bible commentator has said "**Wherever wealth is involved, sin is not far away.**"

In the text there are also issues to solve in the area of wealth and the distribution of that wealth within the Church Community.

We were first introduced to the concept of sharing in Acts Chapter 2: v.45, and it appears again now in Acts 4: v. 32-35.

What happens in these verses is also an introduction to Chapter 6: v.1-7 where we read that the widows were missing out in the distribution of wealth within the Church.

The context of the passage can be divided into two sections.

In Acts 4: v. 32-37 we read an account of the **correct way** to share our wealth within the Christian Community, and in Acts 5: v. 1-11 we read about the **wrong way** to share your wealth in the Church.

I will call the first section – **True Sharing**, and the second section we will call **False Sharing**.

1. True Sharing in the Christian Community. – Acts 4: v. 32-37.

There are four clear things in our passage about the economy in the early Church that we can learn for our benefit.

a) Their sharing and giving was selfless – v. 32.

Before we look at v. 32 I want you to notice something in v. 31.

(Acts 4: v. 31 in N.K.J.)

³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

We are told that ALL of the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit.

The result of them being filled with the Holy Spirit was that they became selfless in their giving. If we are honest, we could all say that before we became a Christian, that we were very selfish. We wanted to go our own way in life, do the things that we wanted to do and spend our money on the people and things that satisfied our selfish desires.

We might have even given money to Charity or the Church to make ourselves feel good. However when the Holy Spirit of God comes into our lives, by God's grace, we have to start sharing our lives with another person. This is the person of the Holy Spirit.

It is this person inside of our hearts that motivates us to selfless giving.

If we are filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit then our financial giving will be selfless.

In v. 32 we are told that the believers were united in heart and mind, and they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had.

If we realise that everything that we have is a gift from God, then perhaps we will more easily be able to share our wealth with others in need?

Don't be mean with your money. Our God is a generous God.

Our giving reflects our understanding of all that God has given us.

b) **Their giving was voluntary – v. 34-35.**

The Apostles didn't have to make an appeal for money; people voluntarily sold land and houses and gave all of the money to the Apostles, and let them decide who had the greatest need.

Of course the Bible does say that we must tithe our income into the Lord's treasury, but as far as selling houses and land or any other thing, this is purely on a voluntary basis.

We must never feel forced, or manipulated to give to God's work.

Our giving must be because we want to give.

The desire to give is voluntary, but comes from our co-operation with the Holy Spirit inside ourselves.

Notice that the money was given to the Apostles to distribute.

It wasn't up to the giver to decide how their money should be used.

The Apostles had the responsibility to distribute the money according to the needs within the Christian Community.

c) **Their giving was sacrificial – v. 34-35.**

We are told that some people sold houses and land in order to provide for the needs of the Christian Community.

Mark 12: v. 41-44 in the N.L.T.

⁴¹ Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. ⁴² Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins.

⁴³ Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. ⁴⁴ For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on."

Jesus says that it is easy to give a small amount out of our wealth, but to give out of our poverty shows great faith and trust in God.

To give away everything that you have requires faith and trust that God will give you everything that you need, when you need it.

It is never wrong to give sacrificially if the Holy Spirit guides you to do so.

However you need to be sure that it is what God is asking you to do at this time in your life.

In 1985 when I sold my own home and left a good job as a sales representative, with a car provided and a good income, I was criticised by many people.

These were both Christians and Non-Christians and some family members.

However 34 years later, I can look back upon my life and say that God has provided all of my needs, as and when those needs have arisen.

We have lacked no good thing, and our four children have not gone without things that they have needed.

About a year ago somebody wrote on a "**My Voice Card**" that they wanted to hear some faith stories about how God has provided for our family over the years.

I don't know who wrote the note or why they wrote it, but I will share one of those stories for all of our encouragement today.

In 1987 after I had completed my two year course at the Faith Mission Bible College, I was due to attend a final Prayer and Praise meeting on the night before my graduation.

I wasn't in the mood for praising God.

Although I was very grateful for two years provision by God for all of our financial needs, I was presently a little low spiritually.

We had no money and no food and the washing machine had broken down.

I had no assurance in my heart of God's provision for that moment in time.

The telephone rang and the principal of the college wanted to know why I had not attended the praise meeting which had just begun.

I explained our situation and he said that he had no idea of our circumstances or of our faith living over the last two years. We had kept it very quiet and gave the appearance that we were quite wealthy, but in fact had no money.

The Bible College principal persuaded me to attend the Praise meeting.

When I arrived the College principal said that they had taken up an offering with the students and gave me quite a sum of money.

He also said that they had taken some food from the College supplies and it would be enough to feed our family for several days.

When I got home that evening I discussed the situation with Wendy.

We both agreed that we could only keep half of the money and half of the food.

The next day I drove across the city of Edinburgh to give half of the money and food that we had received to another College student who I noticed was not at the Praise meeting.

When I arrived at his apartment, the College student was out but his wife answered the door. I handed her half of the money and half of the food.

She said to me that they had no money or food either and that her husband had gone to collect a guest at the railway station and she was on her knees crying to God for food and money.

God wonderfully met our needs and also we were able to share that with this other Christian family.

The thing that I haven't told you is that God had used this family, who had no money or income to meet about 20% of our needs over two years.

You could say in Japanese culture that this was our return gift to this family.

The next day we called a washing machine repair man who fixed our washing machine. After he had fixed the washing machine the man said that he was not prepared to take any payment because he was a Christian.

We have a wonderful God and He is no man's debtor. If God calls you to sacrifice anything for Him He will reward you in his way and His time and will meet all of your needs.

d) Their giving met needs, and not wants in the Christian Community. – v.35

As you are well aware there is a difference between a need and a want.

There might be lots of things that we want, but not all of these things are needed.

Wendy and myself always understood from the Bible that God had promised to meet all of our needs, and not always what we wanted.

We always stood on the promise of Philippians Chapter 4:v. 19.

(Philippians Chapter 4:v. 19 in the N.K.J.)

¹⁹ And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

The promise was given to a Church who themselves were generous in their giving. We were challenged to make sure that our giving was generous too!
Therefore in our prayers we had to decide if the thing was really needed or not.
We learned many lessons during our two years at Bible College about what we really need.

2. False sharing in the Christian Community. – Chapter 5: v. 1-11.

We now come to the second half of our text which is a much more difficult passage to teach about.

This account illustrates the honesty of Luke as an historian.

He could have left out this not so nice incident, but he chose to include it because God had guided him to give an **accurate account of all the things that he had discovered.**

Several Bible commentators have pointed out a parallel between Ananias and Achan.

We may not be familiar with the sin of Achan so I will read the story to you.

Joshua 6: v. 17-19 in N.L.T.

¹⁷ Jericho and everything in it must be completely destroyed as an offering to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and the others in her house will be spared, for she protected our spies.

¹⁸ “Do not take any of the things set apart for destruction, or you yourselves will be completely destroyed, and you will bring trouble on the camp of Israel. ¹⁹ Everything made from silver, gold, bronze, or iron is sacred to the LORD and must be brought into his treasury.”

Joshua Chapter 7: v.10-26. in N.L.T.

¹⁰ But the LORD said to Joshua, “Get up! Why are you lying on your face like this? ¹¹ Israel has sinned and broken my covenant! They have stolen some of the things that I commanded must be set apart for me. And they have not only stolen them but have lied about it and hidden the things among their own belongings. ¹² That is why the Israelites are running from their enemies in defeat. For now Israel itself has been set apart for destruction. I will not remain with you any longer unless you destroy the things among you that were set apart for destruction.

¹³ “Get up! Command the people to purify themselves in preparation for tomorrow. For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Hidden among you, O Israel, are things set apart for the LORD. You will never defeat your enemies until you remove these things from among you.

¹⁴ “In the morning you must present yourselves by tribes, and the LORD will point out the tribe to which the guilty man belongs. That tribe must come forward with its clans, and the LORD will point out the guilty clan. That clan will then come forward, and the LORD will point out the guilty family. Finally, each member of the guilty family must come forward one by one. ¹⁵ The one who has stolen what was set apart for destruction will himself be burned with fire, along with everything he has, for he has broken the covenant of the LORD and has done a horrible thing in Israel.”

¹⁶ Early the next morning Joshua brought the tribes of Israel before the LORD, and the tribe of Judah was singled out. ¹⁷ Then the clans of Judah came forward, and the clan of Zerah was singled out. Then the families of Zerah came forward, and the family of Zimri was singled out. ¹⁸ Every member of Zimri’s family was brought forward person by person, and Achan was singled out.

¹⁹ Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, by telling the truth. Make your confession and tell me what you have done. Don’t hide it from me.”

²⁰ Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. ²¹ Among the plunder I saw a beautiful robe from Babylon, 200 silver coins, and a bar of gold weighing more than a pound. I wanted them so much that I took them. They are hidden in the ground beneath my tent, with the silver buried deeper than the rest.”

²² So Joshua sent some men to make a search. They ran to the tent and found the stolen goods hidden there, just as Achan had said, with the silver buried beneath the rest. ²³ They took the things from the tent and brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites. Then they laid them on the ground in the presence of the LORD.

²⁴ Then Joshua and all the Israelites took Achan, the silver, the robe, the bar of gold, his sons, daughters, cattle, donkeys, sheep, goats, tent, and everything he had, and they brought them to the valley of Achor. ²⁵ Then Joshua said to Achan, “Why have you brought trouble on us? The LORD will now

bring trouble on you.” And all the Israelites stoned Achan and his family and burned their bodies. ²⁶ They piled a great heap of stones over Achan, which remains to this day. That is why the place has been called the Valley of Trouble ever since. So the LORD was no longer angry.

Bengel wrote: “ The sin of Achan and that of Ananias were in many respects similar. They happened at the beginning of the churches of the Old and New Testament.

F.F. Bruce said, “ The story of the Ananias is to the book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. In both narratives an act of deceit interrupts the victorious progress of the people of God. So let us now discover the full story of Ananias and Sapphira.

In chapter 5: v. 1-2 we are told that a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, first sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge **he kept back** part of the money for himself, but the rest of the money was given to the Apostles.

On first appearance it would appear that Ananias had done the same thing as Barnabas had done in v.36-37 of Acts Chapter 4.

(v. 36-37 in Acts Chapter 4)

³⁶ And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles’ feet.

Both people sold a property, both brought the proceeds of the sale to the Apostles.

However the difference between these two people is that Barnabas brought **all the sale of his property**, but Ananias only brought **a proportion of the sale of his property**.

Peter identifies two sins. **These were dishonesty and deceit.**

Ananias was dishonest about his giving and he tried to deceive the Apostles concerning his giving. In v. 4 Peter makes it clear that he was not forced to sell the land, nor did he have to give all the money to the Apostles. He could have chosen to give 10% or 50% or any amount he chose.

Peter pointed out that Ananias had lied to God over this matter.

To understand this sin we need to understand the Greek word that Luke uses in **Chapter 5: v. 2**. In English it is translated **“kept back”**.

The Greek verb that is used is **“nosphizomai”**.

This word means to **“misappropriate”**. This same word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament when it referred to Achan’s theft in Joshua Chapter 7: v.1.

The only other time that this same Greek word is used in the New Testament is where it refers to **somebody stealing**.

Therefore we have to assume that before the sale of the land, Ananias and Sapphira had entered into some kind of contract to give the church the total amount of money raised.

When we understand the story from this perspective we can see that both Ananias and Sapphira were **acting dishonestly**.

They gave the appearance to the Church that their giving was sacrificial but actually that was not the case.

Peter concentrated on the **sin of hypocrisy** rather on the sin of lying.

The Apostle was not only concerned with their lie but also with their hypocrisy.

These two people wanted the **credit and prestige for sacrificial generosity**, without the inconvenience of it.

In order to gain a wonderful reputation in the Church they both told a lie about the sale of their land. The motivation behind their giving was not to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem, but to **boost their own ego and pride**.

Their giving was all about themselves and not motivated by the Holy Spirit.

Behind the giving of Ananias Peter saw the **hallmarks of Satan**.

Acts 5:v.3.

³ 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?

Peter then said to Ananias in v.4 that his lie was actually a sin against God.

After Ananias heard Peter’s words, he suddenly dropped down dead.

The result of this was that “great fear came upon all those who heard these things” (v.5)

In v.7 we are told that three hours later Sapphira arrived, not knowing what had happened to her husband.

In v. 8 Peter gives Sapphira and opportunity to be honest about the sale of the land.

He held out the **hand of Grace**, hoping that she might have realised her wrong.

Peter pointed out that she and her husband had not sold the land for the amount that they had said.

As a result of her sin, she died immediately.

In v.11 we are informed about the reaction of the Christian Community.

(Acts 5: v. 11 in N.K.J.)

¹¹ So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

Q. So what can we learn from this dramatic incident in the early Church that we can apply to our own situation here at O.I.C.?

Application

As we look at this story, there are three clear applications that we would do well to observe and apply to our lives and that of the fellowship at O.I.C.

1. **The seriousness of sin in the Church.** - Peter told us that the lies of Ananias and Sapphira were not just directed against him, but against the Holy Spirit.

Therefore all sin is in fact against God.

Jesus also taught against hypocrisy in Luke Chapter 12: v.1-10.

(Luke 12: v.1-10 in the N.K.J.)

In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first *of all*, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ² For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. ³ Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.

⁴ “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!

⁶ “Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷ But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

⁸ “Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. ⁹ But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

¹⁰ “And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven.

When somebody “**Blasphemes**” against the Holy Spirit, it is when they deliberately go against **revealed truth**.

God can’t forgive people who willfully go against His word.

They must repent of their sin.

We notice that twice Peter points out that great fear came upon the Church.

He does this in v.5 and again in v.11.

Luke highlights the great evil of sinning against God’s people.

Falsehood and lies ruin fellowship in the Church.

If the Hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira had not been exposed and punished then Hypocrisy would have continued in the Church.

God does not want a Church full of hypocrites.

His Son Jesus Christ died for a pure Church and we need to take that fact very seriously here at O.I.C.

Ephesians 5: v. 22-27. In N.K.J.

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

2. The importance of our own conscience.

Acts 24: v.14- 16 in the N.K.J.

¹⁴ But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. ¹⁵ I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust. ¹⁶ This *being* so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.

This is also what John means in 1 John 1: v. 5-10 in N.K.J.

(1 John 1: v. 5-10)

⁵ This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

We must all strive to live a transparent life before God.

We must all be open to the search light of God's Holy Spirit in our lives.

Sadly Ananias and Sapphira did not do this and they were used by God as an example to the Church.

3. The necessity of discipline in the Church.

Sadly the Church historically has not always got it right when it comes to discipline in the Church.

Some Churches have wanted to cover up sins, and others have been too severe for very minor things.

It is clear here that the sin of lying and deception is not minor and needs severe treatment in discipline.

Jesus teaches us in Matthew 18 : v. 15-17 how we should deal with sin in the Church.

(Matt. 18: v. 15-17 in N.L.T.)

¹⁵ "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. ¹⁶ But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

Therefore we all have an individual responsibility of confronting sin in other people's lives before we come to the Pastor and make a complaint.

If our personal challenge is not heeded then we have a responsibility to involve the Pastor and other mature members of the Church.

If the person is still not repentant then the whole Church must hear the matter.

If the person is still not repentant then they must be removed from the fellowship.

May God help us to take sin seriously in our own lives, and in the life of our fellowship in O.I.C. This is the way of Blessing, by God's Holy Spirit.