

## **MAY DAYS**

Pastoral Bible Study on:

### ***“Foundational Discipleship Instructions”***

May 1(TH), 8 (TH), 14 (W), 22 (TH), 29 (TH)

7:00 pm – 8:15 pm weekly

(in-person & on-line)

Instructor:

**Rev. Dr. Leslie D. Braxton**

Week 5

### ***“Radical Generosity and Building Community”***

Text:

Acts 4:32 – 5:10

#### Lesson Overview

Acts 4:32-5:10 focuses on the Church as both the ecclesia (“elect of God”) and as a koinonia (“caring through sharing”) community. This passage emphasizes the church’s unity, generosity, and the consequences of Ananias’ and Sapphira’s deceit. It highlights the early church’s practice of sharing possessions and the strong response of the Spirit when the community prayed. The story of Annias and Sapphira is presented as cautionary tale about dishonesty and a reminder of God’s knowledge of their hearts.

#### **Unity and Shared Possessions (4:32-37):**

*(32) Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. (33) With great power the apostles gave 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 owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. (35) They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (36) There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”). (37) He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.*

The believers’ unity of heart and soul was clearly and compelling manifested in their willingness to relinquish private ownership of material possessions for the sake of the common good. They shared their resources, selling lands, and houses to distribute the proceeds to those in need, demonstrating a commitment to meeting the needs of the community. Thus, earning them the name of Koinonia (“caring through sharing) community. The practice of shared possessions also manifested several of the *notae ecclesiae* (marks of the Church) that Jesus presented in the Beatitudes (e.g. Matthew 5:3, 5, 7, 8). The disciples’ deliverance from the idolatry of material

obsession gave greater credibility and power to their witness of the resurrection of Jesus. Barnabas is introduced as a case in point on the idea of Koinonia at work. He had extraordinary financial means for a first century Jewish man living under Roman occupation. Radical generosity like his made the existence of Christian communes possible. Barnabas took seriously the teaching of Jesus, *"To whom much is given, much is required"* (Luke 12:48)

### **Ananias and Sapphira's Deceit (5:1-10)**

*(1) But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property; (2) with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostle's feet. (3) Ananias, Peter asked, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? (4) While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us, but to God! (5) Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it. (6) The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him. (7) After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. (8) Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you and your husband sold the land for such and such a price." And she said, "Yes, that was the price." (9) then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to put the Holy Spirit to the Lord to the test? Look, 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 died. When the young men came in, they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. (11) And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things.*

The story of Ananias and Sapphira are presented as a contrast to the generosity of Barnabas, which was rooted in both reverence and obedience to God, and love and concern for the well-being of one's neighbor. Like Barnabas, Ananias and Sapphira had extraordinary financial means for first century Jews living under Roman occupation. Like Barnabas, Ananias and Sapphira sold property for the sake of contributing to the common needs of believers who were living in community together. But that's where the similarities end.

While Barnabas presented the full proceeds of the liquidation of his property, Ananias and Sapphira pretended to do so, while keeping a portion of the proceeds for themselves. The apostles interpret their deceit as a test of God's knowledge. The immediate death of Ananias and Sapphira is seen as a manifestation of God's judgement on their deceit. The same God that harshly judged unholy motivations behind the handling of Holy things such as prayer, giving alms to the poor, and fasting in the sermon on the Mountain harshly judges Ananias and Sapphira's deceit regarding their financial gift to the Church. The story is also a reminder that even those who profess to be believers can still be deceitful.