

Our Bible reading for today – Acts 4:32 – 5:11

“Sacrificial Love which Counts”

The Bible tells us to love God. A really good question is, “*What does that look like?*” Jesus said that to love God was the greatest commandment. Maybe an easier question might be asked about what Jesus said was the second greatest commandment. His critics didn’t ask, but He told them anyway. ***“The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*** (^{NAS} Mark 12:31) The man who asked the question was impressed by Jesus’ answer, and Jesus was impressed with him.

In our church’s Statement of Faith, which is good to look at occasionally, Article 8 is about the practical application of our faith to how we live, we say, “*We believe that God’s justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another.*”

What does that look like in the church? It looks like Barnabas! ***“Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.”*** (^{NIV} Acts 5:1) That’s the way Acts chapter 5 begins. I wish this had been left with chapter 4, where I think it belongs, and the translators had used as the 1st word of the verse, “*but, rather*”, or “*in contrast*”, either one of which is good translation, and would have tied the story to how chapter 4 ends, as it described how sacrificial love was happening among believers in the early church. Barnabas was given as a good illustration of what that looked like. Then Ananias and his wife Sapphira were given as a bad illustration of what it didn’t look like. (Or a good illustration of how sacrificial love could be faked.)

It’s natural for us to love our families – our parents, our grandparents, our siblings, our children, our grandchildren – even our aunts, uncles and cousins, etc. We would naturally do anything or give anything to protect or help them. That’s sacrificial love as it should be. Stories abound of bravery or deprivation, without regard for one’s own needs or safety, to provide whatever a dear family member needs. That’s good. It’s what sacrificial love looks like.

We have a spiritual family too. It’s an eternal family. It’s made up of brothers and sisters in the family of God. We call that spiritual family the church. No matter what their age is, we don’t usually talk about them as parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, aunts, uncles and cousins, etc., but as siblings – brothers and sisters in Christ. They’re great to have and wonderful to love, and to be loved by.

Sacrificial love for our spiritual family may cost us something. That cost (as was true of Barnabas) may be financial and material. It may cost us a visit at an inconvenient time. The cost may be in effort, work or time – as we help them with some need – moving, cleaning, fixing, replacing. The cost may be patience we didn’t know we were capable of. It will cost us love, time and possibly the “*mid-night oil*” of intercessory prayer. But sacrificial love is eternally worth whatever the cost!