

Acts 4:32-5:11

Ananias and Sapphira – An Attack on the Beauty of Church Unity

Main Point: The beauty and vulnerability of the Church requires the wrath of God to protect it.

SI: The integrity, believability, and beauty of church unity is so essential to the kingdom purposes of God, that His anger rises when it is threatened. For anger shows us what God loves.

1 The Beauty of Church Unity (4:32-37)

Define church unity – Luke defines it – v. 32

Same as 2:42-27

Luke emphasizing this. Why? b/c of how important it is. Well, why? It reflects the Trinity – unity, community, love, diversity, holiness – set apart-ness.

Humanity was created to have this and every human heart longs for this to be true, and so like for us – our church's vision – A community of Christ's coming kingdom, bringing hope to a broken world.

Beautiful, attractive

Remarkable, noticed, the church in the world turns heads – you love people like that?

Yes.

Sadly, largely bc of the culture of individualism and just plain old selfishness, this seems radical. It seems extreme. But this is the standard for the church to love one another like this. The apostle Paul will later tell the more well-off Corinthians that the impoverished church in Macedonia deeply desired to give to the deeply suffering church in Jerusalem – 2 Cor 8:2 – “for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity...”

What has been given to me is not for me! It is gift to be stewarded for God's kingdom purposes. You have a whole new master, new way of life, new priorities, new goals, new affections that overwhelm and choke out and take over the old.

So, just as for the early NT church here, the same for us – our possessions are a test for us – will we use them to advance our own kingdom and comforts, or will they be freely, joyfully, obediently stewarded for our needs and also for the needs of our brothers and sisters?

How? By 'great grace' – mega grace

Great grace was upon them all – a work of God, supernatural, by grace, by gift.

How does this happen? How does this happen in a whole church?

Two very simple ways – basking in God's grace, basking in the Resurrection

They soaked in, marinated in the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Keep it simple!

How can the church help one another do this?

Well, let's strengthen our strengths – Be who you are. How about let's all go through a series together on True Community in Christ – Jerry Bridges book – quote
Bridges talks about this – Yes, God can provide for our brother's needs in an infinite number of ways. Story – our brother would be just as grateful to God if he found a \$100 bill lying on the sidewalk as he would if he received a \$100 check from one of us.

“But in God's plan for the body, He more often chooses to receive glory through our acts of obedience and generosity than through impersonal providential circumstances” (99).

And just today – one of our songs says “well of water ever springing, Bread of Life so rich and free. Untold wealth that never fails, my Redeemer is to me.” Keep singing, keep strengthening your soul-level belief that you have untold wealth that never fails b/c the Risen Savior is yours and you are His.

I GET to participate in eliminating needs within the community of Christ's people, v. 34.

Makes me want to stop right here.

Trans to 2 – Church unity - it's beautiful, rare, a refuge from the world and so of course it's going to be attacked by evil.

2 Evil's Attack on Church Unity (5:1-11)

Bono, “You're the best thing about me, the best thing that ever happened to this boy. You're the best thing about me, and the best things are easy to destroy.”

Why? Why are the best things easy to destroy?

Ultimately b/c of the fallenness of the world nothing is all the way right, corruption is in everything, even the church. But when it shows up, it is evil and evil has to be confronted or else it will grow.

The contrast between Joseph (Barnabas) and A&S. Luke highlights.

B/c The Church is a model for the kingdom of Heaven. B/c it is God's representative institution on earth, evil will attack.

5:1-11 – negative illustration of what happens when grace, generosity, and trust are violated

'kept back for himself' = pilfering, stealing, defrauding

They were assaulting the integrity of the unity and beauty of the institution and organization of the church – why was this so important?

All of these are Jews who have become followers of Christ

Their fellow Jews believe this is an aberrant sect of Judaism and is definitely not supported by their leaders

Some have lost their inheritance, even their homes, their families

They put themselves in the position of taking from the church instead of giving to the church –

ILLUS from The Band of Brothers when 2 LT Buck Compton is getting to know the troops and he sits with them and gambles. Capt Winters who has been with them since the beginning at Curahee, finds out and gently confronts Compton about it. What's the big deal, I'm trying to get to know them and soldiers gamble.

What if you had won? What do you mean? He still doesn't get it. What if you had won? Never put yourself in a position to take from these men. That's what Ananias and Sapphira had done. It was Satanic. Why? Not b/c of the money but b/c of the lie. They were gambling that the apostles wouldn't find out. That they would get the benefit of giving w/o having to surrender their faith in their riches. It wasn't bringing life to the church, it was bringing death, and evil's goal is to destroy all that is good. And so the wrath of God rises to protect and defend His Church.

A&S – part of the church, seeing the fruit of the joy of community dependence upon one another was bringing. They wanted in on that. They wanted the recognition of being people who give sacrificially to benefit the community, but not all in. Not all the way. There was something in them that resisted full surrender, full trust, full dependence on the Holy Spirit's care of them individually even as they are watching Him care for everyone else!

And so the wrath of God rises to protect His church from such poison – the poison of half-hearted devotion, of syncretism, of mixing self-dependence with surrendered full dependence upon the Spirit. Is it risky, yes! Full surrender to Jesus as your King -

Do you have anxiety about your future? About your finances? About God's control in this messed up broken world? Go further in to full dependence, reliance, trust, surrender, and joyful giving to the church as the church is God's institution to restore all that is broken in this world.

It's not riches it's my faith in riches that is the problem – lots of Scripture on the deceitfulness of riches. So hard to give away but that is how you wage war against riches being your refuge.

ILLUS of what it was like before you came to Christ... self-justification for what your conscience told you was wrong... no one knows about this... God will forgive me... it's a little white lie, a small, insignificant thing.

You know that you needed and still need the wrath of God as one of the motivators towards your own love for God, surrender to Him and loving obedience of Him. This is how He protects you from sin, and how He protects His church... trans to church discipline.

Church Discipline is for Protection – of the person, of those who have been harmed or could be harmed, of God's and the Church's reputation, and for the rest of the community of the saints

3 The Holy Spirit Protects Church Unity (5:5, 10-11) – Protection

The beauty of the vulnerability, integrity, and unity of the church is threatened.

Anger comes when something you love is threatened

The Beauty and Vulnerability of The Church requires the Wrath of God to protect it

And watch what happens – twice – v. 5 and 11 - The Holy Spirit reordered their fears. Put their fears in the right order. A&S very likely motivated by fear of man and fear of the future. So God very aggressively rescues His people from this kind of fear and gives them a renewal in fearing God. Huh? What does this mean?

Fear of man is a biblical phrase – it's shorthand for saying you are afraid of people, motivated by what people think of you, motivated to behave in ways that make sure people like you and don't reject you. Many of us struggle with this. A&S very likely motivated by this.

To fear God is to be overwhelmed by His power above all else. To give us this fear, which is a gift of grace, God leads us to awe, wonder, amazement which are the roots of worship. This is vital b/c fear of man is a form of idolatry – worship.

Many of you can think of ways that God has done this or is doing this in your life – reordered your fears to supernaturally work to give you freedom from the fear of people and lead you to proper fear of God – awe, wonder, some terror, yes, mixed in there.

The wrath of God should be feared – it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God – what is the purpose of this fear? Awe, submission, surrender, obedience,

trust, abandonment of myself to His power and grace. I can't keep anything from Him!
This is meant to be a gift – no secret sins!

This is one of the purposes of church discipline – to show people how seriously God takes the protection of the unity, integrity, and beauty of His church. V. 5 and v. 11.

Is God harsh? My own wrestling with this... yes...

In our therapeutic age we are prone to de-emphasize the wrath of God. But what this does is takes the wrath out of the cross. It takes the extreme nature of the penalty for our selfishness away from the beauty of the cross and the beauty of the church.

The wrath of God.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of God for judgement

We see why Jesus had to come. And why we glory in His love and forgiveness. Without God's wrath against sin, there is no need for Jesus.

And why Jesus came at a time in history when the state punished people by executing them via crucifixion. Crucifixion was an especially brutal form of torture, bloodletting, deliberate physical suffering and humiliation – naked on a cross as a public spectacle of the power of the state to inflict fearful obedience into the populace.

There is NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And the local church has been given the keys to the kingdom to determine who has a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ for church membership and then to slowly, gently, bring discipline to bear on those caught in sin and unrepentance. Not to shun them, but to win them.

Galatians 6:1-2 “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

Conc: Yes, this is a hard passage. See how much God adores His church to protect her from evil and may the Holy Spirit assure us that we are His so that we might fear Him rightly in order to further the unity of His church.

Communion: Jesus is the embodiment of God and He is perfectly both – in **communion** we see this – the wrath of God and the welcome of God. The justice of God and the mercy of God. The brutal gory punishment of the cross and the lamb of God as the substitutionary atonement for me. I deserve the hard death punch, but Jesus took it for me.

This is what we are remembering and by it we are re-remembering ourselves. Annanias and Sapphira wanted to keep something back for themselves which led them to lie to the Spirit and test the Spirit – they were dismembering the Body of Christ.

That's why we fence the table and why the highest action of discipline the church can take is excommunication. Someone, after much pursuit, warning, and trial is continuing to dismember the church, they are excommunicated. And we always keep praying earnestly for them to be restored.

As we take in the elements – these are spiritual reality to re-member each of us and build upon our unity in Christ.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. What is beautiful about the unity of the church? What do you think about the beauty, integrity, and unity of the church being so important to God that He rises in anger when it is threatened?
2. How can we major on the two things the early NT church majored on here in v. 33 – the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and the great grace the Spirit pours out on His Church? How do we get distracted from these?
3. What thoughts come to mind when you hear the phrase, 'the wrath of God' ?
4. Can you think of a story of where you or someone you know benefitted from the church coming alongside in a time of financial need?
5. Why is it typically so hard to trust people in the church, and church leadership, with your personal well-being? What is so vulnerable about it? How can we help each other to grow in this?
6. See Psalm 27:1-6. What led David to trust God in the midst of evil's attacks?
7. Share a way that your group could pray for you and each other to increase your fear of God and decrease your fear of man.

