***The Honeymoon Is Over***

**Summer 2021, Acts 4:32-5:16 July 18, 2021**

***Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events . . . .  
Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord  
and were added to their number.*Acts 5:11-14**

**What “one heart and mind” looks like**

1 *32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. 34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.*

*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.*

Acts 4:32-37 (review Acts 2:42-47)

1) This is both descriptive and prescriptive

2) Barnabas’ integrity sets the stage for the rest of Acts (9:27; 11:22,30; 13:2,13; 15:37)

**Stealing from God**

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.*

Acts 5:1-2 (see Joshua 7 for the parallel in Achan’s sin)

1) Motives matter when providing for the kingdom

2) Unlike Barnabas, Ananias and Sapphira are concerned about appearances

3) Like Achan, Ananias and Sapphira have stolen from God

**God’s “One Time Rule”**

*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 to men 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 the 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 agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! 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.*

Acts 5:1-11 (see Joshua 7)

1) Peter identifies the sin: Ananias and Sapphira loved money and lied to God

2) Maturity in the church requires “speaking the truth in love” (see Ephesians 5:

3) Agreeing together to steal from God is the opposite of being of one mind and soul to serve

4) Discipleship principle: Great power and great grace still require great fear

**As a result . . . .**

*11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.*

*12 The apostles performed many miraculous 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 evil spirits, and all of them were healed.*

Acts 5:11-16

1) For the first time, Luke describes the gathered believers as “church”

2) Great fear is the starting point for God to work

**More Pentecost lessons for the church today**

1) A growing church is a disciplined church

*11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.*

*12 The apostles performed many miraculous 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 . . . .*

Acts 5:11-14

2) How are we discrediting the Holy Spirit today? (See Piper’s “Be Like Barnabas” sermon)

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

Acts 5:9

3) check the fruit of repentance and conversion

Are you converted? It is no answer to tell me that you go to church or chapel, and have been baptized and admitted to the Table of the Lord. All this proves little--I could say as much for Judas Iscariot, Demas, Simon Magus, Ananias, and Sapphira. The question is still not answered. Is your heart changed? Are you really converted to God . . . ?

      (d) Do you think you are converted? Then show the value you place on conversion by your diligence in trying to do good to others. Do you really believe it is a dreadful thing to be an unconverted man? Do you really think that conversion is an unspeakable blessing? Then prove it, prove it, prove it, by constant zealous efforts to promote the conversion of others. Look around the neighborhood in which you live--have compassion on the multitudes who are yet unconverted. Be not content with getting them to come to your church or chapel; aim at nothing less than their entire conversion to God. Speak to them, read to them, pray for them, stir up others to help them. But never, never--if you are a converted man, never be content to go to heaven alone!

Ryle’s “Conversion”



**Resources for further studies in Acts**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on Acts at [*https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg*](https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg)

Spurgeon has sermons on this text at [***http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols4-6/chs209.pdf***](http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols4-6/chs209.pdf)and, on repentance in Peter’s sermon, at [*http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols13-15/chs804.pdf*](http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols13-15/chs804.pdf)

I really appreciate J.C. Ryle’s essay on conversion in Acts: *https://www.monergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*[*https://www.monergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*](https://www.monergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle)

Jonathan Edwards has a wonderful essay on Acts at [*https://www.monergism.com/unbelievers-despise-glory-and-excellency-christ*](https://www.monergism.com/unbelievers-despise-glory-and-excellency-christ)

Deffinbaugh has a helpful introduction at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts*](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts )  
His Acts series is at [*https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts*](https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts)His sermon on this text is at  
[*https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511*](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511)

Tim Keller has a wonderful sermon at [*https://www.monergism.com/signs-king-%E2%80%93-acts-237-47*](https://www.monergism.com/signs-king-%E2%80%93-acts-237-47)

John Piper has an interesting take on this passage at [*https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/be-like-barnabas-not-like-ananias*](https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/be-like-barnabas-not-like-ananias%20)

I have really appreciated John Stott’s *The Spirit, The Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) and F. F. Bruce’s work: *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1980) and *The Book of the Acts* (Eerdmans, 1984).

Carl Trueman’s conclusion in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway, 2020) influenced my thinking on the church. His third point, the importance of proper natural law thinking, is reflected in Kevin DeYoung’s blog at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/)

# Acts Timeline (ESV Study Bible)

# Table Description automatically generated

**Conversion by J. C. Ryle**

*"Repent therefore, and be converted." Acts 3:19*

*"I assure you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:3*

      The subject which forms the title of this paper is one which touches all mankind. It ought to come home to all ranks and classes, high or low, rich or poor, old or young, gentle or simple. Anyone may get to heaven without money, rank, or learning. No one, however wise, wealthy, noble, or beautiful, will ever get to heaven without conversion.

      There are six points of view in which I wish to consider the subject of this paper. I will try to show that conversion is--

      I. A Scriptural thing

      II. A real thing

      III. A necessary thing

      IV. A possible thing

      V. A happy thing

      VI. A thing that may be seen

      I. Let me show, in the first place, that conversion is a SCRIPTURAL thing.

      I mean by this, that conversion is a thing plainly mentioned in the Bible. This is the first point we have to ascertain about anything in religion. It matters nothing who says a thing, and declares it to be religious truth; it matters nothing whether we like or dislike a doctrine. Is it in the Bible? That is the only question. If it is, we have no right to refuse it. If we reject a Bible truth because we do not like it, we do so at the peril of our souls, and might as well become infidels at once. This is a principle which ought never to be forgotten.

      Let us turn to the Bible. Hear what David says, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul", "Sinners shall be converted unto You." (Psalm 19:7; 51:13.) Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ says, "Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 18:3.) Hear what Peter says, "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." (Acts 3:19.) Hear what James says, "He which converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." (James 5:20.)

      I could easily add to this Scriptural evidence. I could quote many passages in which the idea of conversion is contained, though the word itself is not used. To be renewed--to be transformed--to be created anew--to be raised from the dead--to be illuminated--to pass from death to life--to be born again--to put off the old man and put on the new man--all these are Scriptural expressions, which mean the same thing as conversion. They are all the same thing, seen from a different point of view. But enough is as good as a feast, in these matters. There can be no doubt of the truth of my first position--that conversion is a Scriptural thing. It is not a mere device of man's invention--it is in the Bible.

      You may tell me, perhaps, that you do not care for "texts." You may say that you are not accustomed to make single texts decide questions in your religion. If this is your case, I am sorry for you. Our Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles used to quote single texts frequently, and to make everything in their arguments hinge upon them. One plain text with them was sufficient to settle a point. Is it not a serious matter, that while the Lord Jesus and His apostles made such use of single texts, you do not care for them?

      I entreat every reader of these pages to beware of ignorant prejudices on religious subjects. I have known people to find fault with doctrines and opinions as enthusiastic, fanatical, and absurd, in total ignorance that they were finding fault with Scripture itself! They have given sad proof that they spoke of things which they did not understand, and that they knew nothing, comparatively, of the contents of the Bible. It is recorded that, in Somersetshire, one hundred years ago, a great preacher was summoned before the magistrates for swearing in the pulpit. He had used in his sermon the well-known text, "He who believes not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16); and the constable was so ignorant that he did not know the preacher was quoting God's Word! I myself remember a lady of rank being very indignant, because a speaker at a Missionary meeting described the heathen as "having no hope." And yet the speaker had only used the very expression used by Paul, in describing the state of the Ephesians before the Gospel came to them! (Ephes. 2:12.) Beware of making a like mistake. Take care that you do not expose your own ignorance by talking against conversion. Search the Scriptures. Conversion is a scriptural thing.

      II. Let me show, in the second place, that conversion is a REAL thing.

      I feel it very needful to say something about this point. We live in an age of shams, cheats, deceptions, and impositions. It is an age of white-wash, varnish, lacquer, and veneer. It is an age of plaster, plating and gilding. It is an age of adulterated food, paste diamonds, false weights and measures, unsound timber, and shoddy clothing. It is an age of wind-bags, and whitened sepulchers, and cymbals in religion. I can hardly wonder that many regard all Christian professors as suspicious characters, if not hypocrites, and deny the reality of any such thing as conversion.

      Still, notwithstanding all that such people may say, I assert confidently, that there is such a thing as conversion. There are to be seen among people, every here and there, unmistakable cases of a complete turning round of heart, character, tastes, and life--cases which deserve no other name than that of conversion. I say that when a man turns right round from sin to God--from worldliness to holiness--from self-righteousness to self-distrust--from carelessness about religion to deep repentance--from unbelief to faith--from indifference to Christ to strong love to Christ--from neglect of prayer and the Bible, to a diligent use of all means of grace--I say boldly, that such a man is a converted man. When a man's heart is turned upside down in the way I have described, so that he loves what he once hated, and hates what he once loved, I say boldly, that it is a case of conversion. To deny it, is mere obstinacy and affectation. Such a change can be described in no other way. By far the most suitable name that can be given to it is the Scriptural name--conversion.

      Of such changes the Bible gives many unmistakable patterns. Let anyone read attentively the histories of Manasseh king of Judah, of Matthew the apostle, of the woman of Samaria, of Zaccheus the publican, of Mary Magdalene, of Saul of Tarsus, of the Philippian jailer, of Lydia the purple seller, of the Jews to whom Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, of the Corinthians to whom Paul preached. (2 Chron. 33:1-19. Matt. 9:9. John 4:1-29. Luke 19:1-10; 8:2. Acts 9:1-22; 16:14-34; 2:37-41. 1 Cor. 6:9-11.) In every one of these cases there was a mighty change. What can that change be called but conversion?

      Of such changes the history of the Church in every age can supply many well-known examples. Let anyone study the life of Augustine, of Martin Luther, of Hugh Latimer, of John Bunyan, of Colonel Gardiner, of John Newton, of Thomas Scott. In everyone of these lives he will find a description of a mighty turning of heart, opinion, and conduct, towards God. What can that turning be called better than conversion?

      Of such changes every man's own neighborhood and circle of acquaintances will furnish many specimens. Let any honest-minded person of observation look around him, and consider what I assert. Let him deny, if he can, that he can put his finger on men and women of his own age and standing, who are now utterly unlike what they once were in the matter of religion. About their own souls, and the importance of being saved--about sin, and God, and Christ, and repentance, and faith, and holiness--about Bible-reading, and praying--about all these things they are completely changed. I challenge any sensible man to deny that he knows such people. They are to be met with here and there in every part of the kingdom. Once more I ask, what can such changes be called but conversions?

      I feel almost ashamed to dwell so long on this point. It seems like spending time in proving that two plus two make four, or that the sun rises in the east. But, alas, there are too many people who will allow nothing, and will dispute everything, in religion! They know that they are not yet converted themselves, and they therefore try hard to make out that nobody was ever converted at all! I trust I have given a sufficient answer to all such people. I have shown you that conversion is a real true thing.

      III. Let me show, in the third place, that conversion is a NECESSARY thing.

      This is a point of great importance. Some worthy people are ready enough to admit that conversion is a Scriptural truth and a reality--but not a thing which needs to be pressed on most English people. The heathen, they grant, need conversion. Even the thieves, and fallen characters, and inhabitants of jails, they allow, may require conversion. But to talk of conversion being necessary for Church-going people, is to talk of things which they cannot see at all. "Such people may, in some cases, need a little stirring up and amendment. They may not be quite as good as they ought to be--it would be better if they attended more to religion; but you have no right to say they need conversion! It is uncharitable, harsh, narrow-minded, bitter, wrong, to tell them they require conversion!"

      This sadly common notion is a complete delusion. It is a pure invention of man's, without a scrap of foundation in God's Word. The Bible teaches expressly that the change of heart, called conversion, is a thing absolutely needed by everyone. It is needed because of the total corruption of human nature. It is needed because of the condition of every man's natural heart. All people born into the world, of every rank and nation, must have their hearts changed between the cradle and the grave, before they can go to heaven. All, all people, without exception, must be converted.

      Without conversion of heart we cannot serve God on earth. We have naturally neither faith, nor fear, nor love, toward God and His Son Jesus Christ. We have no delight in His Word. We take no pleasure in prayer or communion with Him. We have no enjoyment in His ordinances, His house, His people, or His day. We may have a form of Christianity, and keep up a round of ceremonies and religious performances. But without conversion we have no more heart in our religion than a brick or a stone. Can a dead corpse serve God? We know it cannot. Well, without conversion we are dead toward God.

      Look round the congregation with which you worship every Sunday. Mark how little interest the great majority of them take in what is going on. Observe how listless, and apathetic, and indifferent, they evidently are about the whole affair. It is clear their hearts are not there! They are thinking of something else, and not of religion. They are thinking of business, or money, or pleasure, or worldly plans, or bonnets, or gowns, or new dresses, or amusements. Their bodies are there--but not their hearts. And what is the reason? What is it they all need? They need conversion. Without it they only come to church for fashion and form's sake, and go away from church to serve the world or their sins.

      But this is not all. Without conversion of heart we could not enjoy heaven, if we got there. Heaven is a place where holiness reigns supreme, and sin and the world have no place at all. The company will all be holy; the employments will all be holy; it will be an eternal Sabbath-day. Surely if we go to heaven, we must have a heart in tune and able to enjoy it, or else we shall not be happy. We must have a nature in harmony with the element we live in, and the place where we dwell. Can a fish be happy out of water? We know it cannot. Well, without conversion of heart we could not be happy in heaven.

      Look round the neighborhood in which you live, and the people with whom you are acquainted. Think what many of them would do if they were cut off forever from money, and business, and newspapers, and cards, and balls, and races, and hunting, and shooting, and worldly amusements! Would they like it? Think what they would feel if they were shut up forever with Jesus Christ, and saints, and angels! Would they be happy? Would the eternal company of Moses, and David, and Paul, be pleasant to those who never take the trouble to read what those holy men wrote? Would heaven's everlasting praise suit the taste of those who can hardly spare a few minutes in a week for private religion, even for prayer? There is but one answer to be given to all these questions. We must be converted before we can enjoy heaven. Heaven would be no heaven to any child of Adam without conversion.

      Let no man deceive us. There are two things which are of absolute necessity to the salvation of every man and woman on earth. One of them is the mediatorial work of Christ for us--His atonement, satisfaction, and intercession. The other is the converting work of the Spirit in us--His guiding, renewing, and sanctifying grace. We must have both a title and a heart for heaven. Sacraments are not necessary to salvation--a man may be saved without them, like the penitent thief. An interest in Christ and conversion are absolutely necessary--without them no one can possibly be saved. All, all alike, high or low, rich or poor, old or young, gentle or simple, churchmen or dissenters, baptized or unbaptized, all must be converted or perish. There is no salvation without conversion. It is a necessary thing.

      IV. Let me now show, in the fourth place, that conversion is a POSSIBLE thing.

      I think I know the feelings which come across many people's minds, when they read the things which I am writing in this paper. They take refuge in the idea that such a change as conversion is quite impossible, except for a favored few. "It is all very well," they argue, "for parsons to talk of conversion; but the thing cannot be done; we have work to mind, families to provide for, business to attend to. It is no use expecting miracles now. We cannot be converted." Such thoughts are very common. The devil loves to put them before us, and our own lazy hearts are only too ready to receive them--but they will not stand examination. I am not afraid to lay it down that conversion is a possible thing. If it were not so, I would not say another word.

      In saying this, however, I would be sorry to be mistaken. I do not for a moment mean that anyone can convert himself, change his own heart, take away his own corrupt nature, put in himself a new spirit. I mean nothing of the kind. I would as soon expect the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision to give themselves life. (Ezek. 37:3.) I only mean that there is nothing in Scripture, nothing in God, nothing in man's condition, which warrants anyone in saying, "I can never be converted." There lives not the man or woman on earth of whom it could be said, "their conversion is an impossibility." Anyone, however sinful and hardened, anyone may be converted.

      Why do I speak so confidently? How is it that I can look round the world, and see the desperate wickedness that is in it, and yet despair of no living man's soul? How is it that I can say to anyone, however hard, fallen, and bad, "Your case is not hopeless--you, even you, may be converted?" I can do it because of the things contained in Christ's Gospel. It is the glory of that Gospel that under it nothing is impossible.

      Conversion is a possible thing, because of the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him is life. In His hand are the keys of death and hell. He has all power in heaven and earth. He quickens whom He will. (John 1:4; Rev. 1:18; Matt. 28:18; John 5:21.) It is as easy to Him to create new hearts out of nothing, as it was to create the world out of nothing. It is as easy to Him to breathe spiritual life into a stony, dead heart, as it was to breathe natural life into the clay of which Adam was formed, and make him a living man. There was nothing He could not do on earth. Wind, sea, disease, death, the devil--all were obedient to His word. There is nothing that He cannot do in heaven at God's right hand. His hand is as strong as ever--His love is as great as ever. The Lord Jesus Christ lives, and therefore conversion is not impossible.

      But beside this, conversion is a possible thing, because of the almighty power of the Holy Spirit, whom Christ sends into the hearts of all whom He undertakes to save. The same divine Spirit who co-operated with the Father and Son in the work of creation, co-operates specially in the work of conversion. It is He who conveys life from Christ, the great Fountain of Life, into the hearts of sinners. He who moved on the face of the waters before those wonderful words were spoken, "Let there be light," is He who moves over sinners' souls, and takes their natural darkness away. Great indeed is the invisible power of the Holy Spirit! He can soften that which is hard. He can bend that which is stiff and stubborn. He can give eyes to the spiritually blind, ears to the spiritually deaf, tongues to the spiritually mute, feet to the spiritually lame, warmth to the spiritually cold, knowledge to the spiritually ignorant, and life to the spiritually dead. "None teaches like Him!" (Job 36:22.) He has taught thousands of ignorant sinners, and never failed to make them "wise unto salvation." The Holy Spirit lives, and therefore conversion is never impossible.

      What can you say to these things? Away with the idea forever that conversion is not possible. Cast it behind you--it is a temptation of the devil. Look not at yourself, and your own weak heart--for then you may well despair. Look upward at Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and learn that with them nothing is impossible. Yes! the age of spiritual miracles is not yet past! Dead souls in our congregations can yet be raised; blind eyes can yet be made to see; speechless prayerless tongues can yet be taught to pray. No one ought ever to despair. When Christ has left heaven, and laid down His office as the Savior of sinners--when the Holy Spirit has ceased to dwell in hearts, and is no longer God--then, and not until then, men and women may say, "We cannot be converted." Until then, I say boldly, conversion is a possible thing. If people are not converted, it is because they "will not come to Christ for life." (John 5:40.) Conversion is possible.

      V. Let me show, in the fifth place, that conversion is a HAPPY thing.

      I shall have written in vain if I leave this point untouched. There are thousands, I firmly believe, who are ready to admit the truth of all I have said hitherto. Scriptural, real, necessary, possible--all this they willingly allow conversion to be. "Of course," they say, "we know it is all true. People ought to be converted." But will it increase a man's happiness to be converted? Will it add to a man's joys, and lessen his sorrows, to be converted? Here alas, is a point at which many stick fast. They have a secret, lurking fear, that if they are converted they must become melancholy, miserable, and low-spirited. Conversion and a sour face--conversion and a gloomy brow--conversion and an ill-natured readiness to snub young people, and put down all mirth--conversion and a sorrowful countenance--conversion and sighing and groaning--all these are things which they seem to think must go together! No wonder that such people shrink from the idea of conversion!

      The notion I have just described is very common and very mischievous. I desire to protest against it with all my heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. I assert without hesitation, that the conversion described in Scripture is a happy thing and not a miserable one; and that if converted people are not happy, the fault must be in themselves. The happiness of a true Christian, no doubt, is not quite of the same sort as that of a worldly man. It is a calm, solid, deep flowing, substantial joy. It is not made up of excitement, levity, and boisterous spasmodic mirth. It is the sober, quiet joy of one who does not forget death, judgment, eternity, and a world to come, even in his chief mirth. But in the main I am confident the converted man is the happiest man.

      What says the Scripture? How does it describe the feelings and experience of people who have been converted? Does it give any countenance to the idea that conversion is a sorrowful and melancholy thing? Let us hear what Levi felt, when he had left the receipt of custom to follow Christ. We read that "he made a great feast in his own house," as if it was an occasion of gladness. (Luke 5:29.) Let us hear what Zaccheus the publican felt, when Jesus offered to come to his house. We read that "he received Him joyfully." (Luke 19:6.) Let us hear what the Samaritans felt, when they were converted through Philip's preaching. We read that "there was great joy in that city." (Acts 8:8.) Let us hear what the Ethiopian eunuch felt in the day of his conversion. We read that "he went on his way rejoicing." (Acts 8:39.) Let us hear what the Philippian jailer felt in the hour of his conversion. We read that "he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." (Acts 16:34) In fact the testimony of Scripture on this subject is always one and the same. Conversion is always described as the cause of joy and not of sorrow, of happiness and not of misery.

      The plain truth, is that people speak ill of conversion because they know nothing really about it. They run down converted men and women as unhappy, because they judge them by their outward appearance of calmness, gravity, and quietness, and know nothing of their inward peace. They forget that it is not those who boast most of their own performances who do most, and it is not those who talk most of their happiness who are in reality the happiest people.

      A converted man is happy, because he has peace with God. His sins are forgiven; his conscience is free from the sense of guilt--he can look forward to death, judgment, and eternity, and not feel afraid. What an immense blessing to feel forgiven and free! He is happy because he finds order in his heart. His passions are controlled, his affections are rightly directed. Everything in his inner man, however weak and feeble, is in its right place, and not in confusion. What an immense blessing order is! He is happy, because he feels independent of circumstances. Come what will, he is provided for--sickness, and losses, and death, can never touch his treasure in heaven, or rob him of Christ. What a blessing to feel independent! He is happy, because he feels ready. Whatever happens he is somewhat prepared--the great business is settled; the great concern of life is arranged. What a blessing to feel ready! These are indeed true springs of happiness. They are springs which are utterly shut up and sealed to an unconverted man. Without forgiveness of sins, without hope for the world to come, dependent on this world for comfort, unprepared to meet God, he cannot be really happy. Conversion is an essential part of true happiness.

      Settle it in your mind today that the friend who labors for your conversion to God is the best friend that you have. He is a friend not merely for the life to come--but for the life that now is. He is a friend to your present comfort as well as to your future deliverance from hell. He is a friend for time as well as for eternity. Conversion is a happy thing.

      VI. Let me now show you, in the last place, that conversion is a thing that may be SEEN.

      This is a part of my subject which ought never to be overlooked. Well would it be for the Church and the world, if in every age it had received more attention. Thousands have turned away in disgust from Christianity, because of the wickedness of many who profess it. Hundreds have caused the very name of conversion to stink, by the lives they have lived after declaring themselves converted. They have fancied that a few spasmodic sensations and convictions were the true grace of God. They have imagined themselves converted, because their animal feelings were excited. They have called themselves "converts" without the slightest right or title to that honored name. All this has done immense harm, and it is doing peculiar harm in the present day. The times demand a very clear assertion of the great principle--that true conversion is a thing that can always be seen.

      I admit fully that the manner of the Spirit's working is invisible. It is like the wind. It is like the attractive power of the magnet. It is like the influence of the moon upon the tides. There is something about it far beyond the reach of man's eyes or understanding. But while I admit this decidedly, I maintain no less decidedly that the effects of the Spirit's work in conversion will always be seen. Those effects may be weak and feeble at first--to the natural man they may hardly be visible, and not understood. But effects there always will be--some fruit will always be seen where there is true conversion. Where no effect can be seen, there you may be sure there is no grace. Where no visible fruit can be found, there you may be sure is no conversion.

      Does anyone ask me what we may expect to see in a true conversion? I reply, There will always be something seen in a converted man's character, and feelings, and conduct, and opinions, and daily life. You will not see in him perfection; but you will see in him something peculiar, distinct, and different from other people. You will see him hating sin, loving Christ, following after holiness, taking pleasure in his Bible, persevering in prayer. You will see him penitent, humble, believing, temperate, charitable, truthful, good-tempered, patient, upright, honorable, kind. These, at any rate, will be his aims--these are the things which he will follow after, however short he may come of perfection. In some converted people you will see these things more distinctly, in others less. This only I say, wherever there is conversion, something of this kind will be seen.

      I care nothing for a conversion which has neither marks nor evidences to show. I shall always say, "Give me some marks if I am to think you are converted. Show me your conversion without any marks, if you can! I do not believe in it. It is worth nothing at all." You may call such doctrine legal if you please. It is far better to be called legal than to be an Antinomian. Never, never, will I allow that the blessed Spirit can be in a man's heart, when no fruit of the Spirit can be seen in his life. A conversion which allows a man to live in sin, to lie, and drink, and swear, is not the conversion of the Bible. It is a counterfeit conversion, which can only please the devil, and will lead the man who is satisfied with it, not to heaven--but to hell.

      Let this last point sink down into your heart and never be forgotten. Conversion is not only a Scriptural thing, a real thing, a necessary thing, a possible thing, and a happy thing--there remains one more grand characteristic about it--it is a thing that will always be seen.

**APPLICATION**

      And now let me wind up this paper by a few plain appeals to the consciences of all who read it. I have tried to the best of my power to unfold and explain the nature of conversion. I have endeavored to set it forth in every point of view. Nothing remains but to try to bring it home to the heart of everyone into whose hands this book may fall.

      (1) First of all, I urge every reader of this paper to find out whether he is converted. I am not asking about other people. The heathen no doubt need conversion. The unhappy inhabitants of jails and reformatories need conversion. There may be people living near your own house who are open sinners and unbelievers, and need conversion. But all this is beside the question. I ask--Are you converted yourself?

      Are you converted? It is no reply to tell me that many people are hypocrites and false professors. It is no argument to say that there are many sham revivals, and mock conversions. All this may be very true--but the abuse of a thing does not destroy the use of it. The circulation of bad money is no reason why there should not be good coin. Whatever others may be--Are you converted yourself?

      Are you converted? It is no answer to tell me that you go to church or chapel, and have been baptized and admitted to the Table of the Lord. All this proves little--I could say as much for Judas Iscariot, Demas, Simon Magus, Ananias, and Sapphira. The question is still not answered. Is your heart changed? Are you really converted to God?

      (2) In the next place, I urge every reader of this book who is not converted, never to rest until he is. Make haste awake to know your danger. Escape for your life! Flee from the wrath to come! Time is short! Eternity is near! Life is uncertain! Judgment is sure! Arise and call upon God. The throne of grace is yet standing--the Lord Jesus Christ is yet waiting to be gracious. The promises of the Gospel are wide, broad, full, and free--lay hold upon them this day. Repent, and believe the Gospel--repent, and be converted. Rest not, rest not, rest not, until you know and feel that you are a converted man.

      (3) In the last place, I offer a word of exhortation to every reader who has reason to think that he has gone through that blessed change of which I have been speaking in this paper. You can remember the time when you were not what you are now. You can remember a time in your life when old things passed away, and all things became new. To you also I have something to say. Allow the word of friendly counsel, and lay it to heart.

      (a) Do you think that you are converted? Then give all diligence to make your calling and conversion sure. Leave nothing uncertain that concerns your immortal soul. Labor to have the witness of the Spirit with your spirit, that you are a child of God. Assurance is to be had in this world, and assurance is worth the seeking. It is good to have hope--it is far better to feel sure.

      (b) Do you think that you are converted? Then do not expect impossibilities in this world. Do not suppose the day will ever come when you will find no weak point in your heart, no wanderings in private prayer, no distraction in Bible-reading, no cold desires in the public worship of God, no flesh to mortify, no devil to tempt, no worldly snares to make you fall. Expect nothing of the kind. Conversion is not perfection! Conversion is not heaven! The old man within you is yet alive--the world around you is yet full of danger; the devil is not dead. Remember at your best, that a converted sinner is still a poor weak sinner, needing Christ every day. Remember this, and you will not be disappointed.

      (c) Do you think that you are converted? Then labor and desire to grow in grace every year that you live. Look not to the things behind; be not content with old experience, old grace, old attainments in religion. Desire the sincere milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby. (1 Pet. 2:2.) Entreat the Lord to carry on the work of conversion more and more in your soul, and to deepen spiritual impressions within you. Read your Bible more carefully every year--watch over your prayers more jealously every year. Beware of becoming sleepy and lazy in your religion. There is a vast difference between the lowest and the highest forms in the school of Christ. Strive to get on in knowledge, faith, hope, charity, and patience. Let your yearly motto be, "Onward, Forward, Upward!" to the last hour of your life.

      (d) Do you think you are converted? Then show the value you place on conversion by your diligence in trying to do good to others. Do you really believe it is a dreadful thing to be an unconverted man? Do you really think that conversion is an unspeakable blessing? Then prove it, prove it, prove it, by constant zealous efforts to promote the conversion of others. Look around the neighborhood in which you live--have compassion on the multitudes who are yet unconverted. Be not content with getting them to come to your church or chapel; aim at nothing less than their entire conversion to God. Speak to them, read to them, pray for them, stir up others to help them. But never, never--if you are a converted man, never be content to go to heaven alone!

# Subtraction Leads to Multiplication - The First Instance of Church Discipline (Acts 4:32—5:11) Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511*](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511)

### Introduction[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P10_231)

I am aware of a group of untaught Christians who apparently took our text so literally that they were seriously thinking of taking the life of one of their members, who had committed a serious sin. While I appreciate their zeal to do what the Bible teaches, I think they have misapplied Luke’s account of An anias and Sapphira. On the other extreme, there are many more who would like to simply set this passage aside. They conclude that Peter’s actions and the resulting death of two church members is entirely uncalled for and inappropriate. Unfortunately some who reject the teaching of our text would be considered Bible scholars. These are certainly not the kind of scholars we need.

Actually, there are many who would like to set aside our text and its implications because it exposes a good deal of shoddy thinking and outright sin in the church. For example, “church growth” is a very popular subject today, but I have not personally seen any significant work on the subject which takes our text seriously. By the title I have chosen for this message, you can see that I believe “subtraction sometimes leads to multiplication.” That is to say, church discipline actually promotes church growth.

Let’s face it; none of us are really inclined to add this passage in Acts to our list of “happy texts”[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P14_2132) in the Bible. As we study this passage, let us beware of setting it aside as irrelevant to the church today. And let us strive to keep an open mind to its meaning and application. May we look to the Holy Spirit to expose any falsehood or deception in our thinking or practice. May this lesson help us to be “honest to God” and to others.

### The Structure of Our Text

Our text falls into three major divisions:

[Acts 4:32-35](javascript:%7b%7d)A general description of the health of the church in Jerusalem

[Acts 4:36-37](javascript:%7b%7d)Barnabas cited as a specific example of verses 32-35

[Acts 5:1-11](javascript:%7b%7d)Ananias and Sapphira serve as a stark contrast, both to verses 32-35 and to Barnabas in verses 36-37

#### The State of the Church in Jerusalem [Acts 4:32-35](javascript:%7b%7d)

32 The group of those who believed were of one heart and mind,[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P22_3181) and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but everything was held in common. 33 With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on them all. 34 **For there was no one needy among them, because those who were owners of land or houses were selling them and bringing the proceeds from the sales 35 and placing them at the apostles’ feet. The proceeds were distributed to each, as anyone had need** ([Acts 4:32-35](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P23_3702)

This is the second summary description of the state of the church in Jerusalem. The first is found in [Acts 2](javascript:%7b%7d):

43 Reverential awe came over everyone, and many wonders and miraculous signs came about by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and held everything in common, 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need. 46 Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts, 47 praising God and having the good will of all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved ([Acts 2:43-47](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Both summaries emphasize the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the church, particularly through the apostles, who were proclaiming salvation through the resurrected Christ. Both texts emphasize the way the early church shared with those who were in need. In chapter 4, this sharing seems to have become a bit more formal, as now those who are giving lay the money at the feet of the apostles, so that they might distribute these funds to the needs.

### Great Power

The word “**great**” is found three times in our text. It is worthwhile to consider those things Luke considered “**great**.” The first of these “greats” is “**great power**.” It is not surprising that Luke would emphasize the fact that “**great power**” was demonstrated through the hands of the apostles.[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P29_6090) This power is not restricted to just Peter and John, but is displayed through all the apostles. By performing healings, signs and wonders through the apostles, God authenticated the gospel as defined and declared by them. It was difficult to deny such miracles or their significance (see [Acts 4:16, 22](javascript:%7b%7d)). God was indeed at work through His apostles. Those who proclaimed that Jesus Christ was alive were those who performed miracles in His name.

### Great Unity[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P31_7015)

Next, Luke calls our attention to the unity of the saints in Jerusalem. In chapter 2, the Christians were gathering together in the temple and from house to house ([Acts 2:47](javascript:%7b%7d)). Now, in our text in [Acts 4](javascript:%7b%7d), Luke tells us that the saints in Jerusalem – all of them – were “**of one heart and mind**.” They were united by the work of Christ on the cross of Calvary and by the Holy Spirit who dwelt in and among them.

### Great Grace

Luke also tells us that “**great grace was on them all**” ([Acts 4:33](javascript:%7b%7d)). While “**great power**” seems to be restricted to the apostles, who performed many signs and wonders, “**great grace**” appears to be evident among all the saints. Notice that verse 34 begins with the word “**for**,” indicating that what follows is a further explanation of the statement that “**great grace****[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P35_7944) was on them all**.”

Initially I was inclined to understand Luke to mean that the church showed great grace by sharing their resources with those in need. I can understand how this meaning would come to mind, but it does not appear to be what Luke intended us to understand. So far as I can tell, Luke does not use the word *charis* to refer to benevolent giving.[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P37_8548) *Koinoneo* or *koinonia**[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P38_8695)* (the verb and noun terms denoting “fellowship” or “sharing”) are Luke’s normal way of speaking of financial sharing in Acts.

It now seems to me that Luke is informing us that God was showering His grace upon the Jerusalem church, at least in part due to the unity of the believers, as evidenced by their caring for one another in their financial needs. For various reasons these were not easy times for those living in Jerusalem, the result being that many of the saints in Jerusalem were in financial straits. It is not merely generosity which prompts those with financial resources to give, however; it is a deep unity among the saints. I recall Paul’s words in [Romans 12](javascript:%7b%7d):

9 Love must be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good. 10 **Be devoted to one another with mutual love, showing eagerness in honoring one another**. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be enthusiastic in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, endure in suffering, persist in prayer. 13 **Contribute to the needs of the saints**, pursue hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse. 15 **Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep**. 16 **Live in harmony with one another**; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Do not be conceited ([Romans 12:9-16](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Great unity (“**one heart and soul**,” [Acts 4:32](javascript:%7b%7d)) leads to empathy with those in need and thus an eagerness to give to meet those needs. Unity expresses itself in community, and community expresses itself in sharing, and in all of this, God’s grace is showered on His church, and then through it.

The health of the church in Jerusalem is seen in the way the saints responded to the needs of their fellow-believers. Apparently there was little cash on hand, probably because that had been given earlier. Thus the saints were selling some of their possessions to obtain the cash to give for the needy.

Before we leave these verses, I would like to make three observations. *First, let us note that this text does not describe communism as we know it.*The communism of our day says, “What’s yours is mine.” The community of believers in Jerusalem said, “What’s mine is yours.” There is a world of difference between these two methods of sharing the wealth. Communism seizes property from those who have. Theoretically, it then distributes wealth among the poor, but this seldom happens. Often those in control of the government end up with much of what they have taken from others. Christianity voluntarily gives property to relieve the needs of those who do not have. I understand that individuals retained possession of their property until a need arose, and then some would sell a particular possession at a time of need.

*Second, this giving is not a matter of tithing.*The saints were obligated to financially support those, like Peter, who ministered to them:

3 This is my defense to those who examine me. 4 Do we not have the right to financial support? 5 Do we not have the right to the company of a believing wife, like the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas? 6 Or do only Barnabas and I lack the right not to work? 7 Who ever serves in the army at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its fruit? Who tends a flock and does not consume its milk? ([1 Corinthians 9:3-7](javascript:%7b%7d))

Now the one who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with the one who teaches it ([Galatians 6:6](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Our text deals with giving that is above and beyond the normal giving of the saints.

*Third, the giving here is for ministry to those who are in financial need.* The religion of the day had all kinds of excuses for not helping the poor. In a time when piety was measured in terms of earthly prosperity, those who were poor were viewed as those under divine discipline (see [John 9:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d)). Thus, to give to the suffering could be viewed as resisting God. The church looked on the needy as an opportunity to express their love and (in the case of needy Christians) their unity with fellow-believers.

#### Barnabas: A Good Example [Acts 4:36-37](javascript:%7b%7d)

36 So Joseph, a Levite who was a native of Cyprus, called by the apostles Barnabas (which is translated “son of encouragement”), 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and placed it at the apostles’ feet ([Acts 4:36-37](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I believe there are several reasons why Luke included this specific information about Barnabas. *In the first place, Barnabas is an excellent example of what Luke has just described.* Verses 32-35 provided us with a general statement regarding the health of the church in Jerusalem. Verses 36 and 37 provide us with an excellent example of the attitude of the saints in the church toward the needy and toward their own material possessions. Barnabas had a piece of property which he sold, and then brought the proceeds to the apostles to distribute as they saw fit. This is the way it was supposed to be, the way Luke had just described it in more general terms.

*Secondly, Barnabas provides an excellent backdrop against which the deception of Ananias and Sapphira will be contrasted.* Barnabas was a man respected by the church. He was the source of encouragement to many. He saw a need and recognized he had the resources to help meet it. Without any fanfare, he sold his property and laid the proceeds at the apostles’ feet. This truly good deed is in stark contrast to what we will read in the early verses of chapter 5.

*Finally, this brief reference to Barnabas is Luke’s way of introducing this great leader (and example) to us,* in preparation for his later appearances in Acts. Paul (Saul) will be introduced to us in [Acts 8:1](javascript:%7b%7d), while his conversion does not come until chapter 9 and his missionary career commences in chapter 13.[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P54_14558) Barnabas will play a significant role in the life and ministry of Paul ([Acts 9:26-28; 11:20-26; 13:1](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.), will be a blessing to the saints at Antioch ([Acts 20:19-30](javascript:%7b%7d)), and will minister greatly to John Mark ([Acts 15:36-41](javascript:%7b%7d)). Luke chooses to focus on the heart of Barnabas and his character as the basis of a life of fruitful ministry.

I believe Barnabas’ ministry with money was the starting point of his amazing life of ministry, as seen in the Book of Acts. It was Luke who recorded these words of our Lord regarding money:

9 And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by how you use worldly wealth, so that when it runs out you will be welcomed into the eternal homes. 10 “The one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and the one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. 11 If then you haven’t been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will entrust you with the true riches? 12 And if you haven’t been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you your own? 13 No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” ([Luke 16:9-13](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Luke was faithful in the relatively small matter of money, and as God expanded his ministry, he was faithful there as well. Barnabas (or Joseph) was known by the apostles as the “**son of encouragement**” ([Acts 4:36](javascript:%7b%7d)). I believe his selfless attitude made him a servant, who was observant of – and responsive to – the needs of others. This was apparent in the sale of his property in our text; it is likewise apparent in his responsiveness to Paul’s needs ([Acts 9](javascript:%7b%7d) and 11), those in the church at Antioch ([Acts 11](javascript:%7b%7d)), and John Mark’s need of someone to come alongside ([Acts 15](javascript:%7b%7d)).[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P58_16425)

#### Ananias and Sapphira [Acts 5:1-11](javascript:%7b%7d)

1 Now a man named Ananias, together with Sapphira his wife, sold a piece of property. 2 He kept back for himself part of the proceeds with his wife’s knowledge; he brought only part of it and placed 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 for yourself part of the proceeds from the sale of the land? 4 Before it was sold, did it not belong to you? And when it was sold, was the money not at your disposal? How have you thought up this deed in your heart? You have not lied to people but to God!” 5 When Ananias heard these words he collapsed and died, and great fear gripped all who heard about it. 6 So the young men came, wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. 7 After an interval of about three hours, his wife came in, but she did not know what had happened. 8 Peter said to her, “Tell me, were the two of you paid this amount for the land?” Sapphira said, “Yes, that much.” 9 Peter then told her, “Why have you 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 At once she collapsed at his feet and died. So when the young men came in, they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 Great fear gripped the whole church and all who heard about these things ([Acts 5:1-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Let me begin by making a few observations. First, when the sin of Ananias is described in verses 1 and 2, as well as when Peter rebukes him in verses 3 and 4, Ananias is referred to in a singular form.[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P62_18334) When Peter questions and rebukes Sapphira in verses 8 and 9, he uses the plural, thus linking Sapphira with the sin of her husband. Luke’s account in verses 1 and 2, along with Sapphira’s testimony in verse 8, makes it clear that she was aware of and participated in his deception. We should also note that Ananias alone appeared before the apostles with the money he claimed to be the full amount of the sale. Sapphira appears three hours later. (I have to confess, my first thought was that she was shopping!)

All of this inclines me to suspect that this deception was initiated by Ananias, and not by Sapphira.[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P64_19140) He is the instigator, but she – by her silence, and later by her false statement – was his accomplice, and thus she shared in his guilt and discipline. The way it worked out, Sapphira was given the opportunity to confess her role in this sin, and thus to distance herself from divine discipline. Unfortunately, she persisted in her sin.

Second, I would observe that the expressions “**kept back**” (verse 2) and “**keep back**” (verse 3) are the same verb. This verb is used only three times in the New Testament, the final time being in [Titus 2](javascript:%7b%7d):

9 Slaves are to be subject to their own masters in everything, to do what is wanted and not talk back, 10 **not pilfering**, but showing all good faith, in order to bring credit to the teaching of God our Savior in everything ([Titus 2:9-10](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Every time this term is used in the New Testament (and elsewhere, it would seem), it has a negative connotation. While Ananias was certainly free to keep some or all of the proceeds of the sale of their property, it was stealing once he claimed to give all. I could not help but compare the sin of Ananias and Sapphira with that of Judas:

3 Then Mary took three quarters of a pound of expensive aromatic oil from pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus. She then wiped his feet dry with her hair. (Now the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfumed oil.) 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was going to betray him) said, 5 “Why wasn’t this oil sold for three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor?” 6 (**Now Judas said this not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief. As keeper of the money box, he used to steal what was put into it.**) ([John 12:3-6](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine)

While John does not use the same term we find in our text in Acts, the sin is strikingly similar. Both took something that was designated for others, setting aside a small portion for themselves. No wonder this sin was taken so seriously!

Third, I would point out that Peter did not take the lives of Ananias and Sapphira, nor did he pronounce a death sentence upon Ananias. God took the lives of Ananias and Sapphira, not Peter. Peter rebuked Ananias for his sin, but he did not pronounce sentence on him. He left this matter to God. When God took the life of Ananias, it then became clear to Peter what Sapphira’s fate would be, unless she confessed. Sadly, she did not, and she died like her husband.

I would finally observe that there is no indication Ananias and Sapphira were unsaved. It would be easy to conclude that this couple had never come to faith, but Luke makes no such indication. Christians are fully capable of such sins.

Luke does not tell us the details of how this sin came about. It could be that it happened this way:

Ananias and Sapphira come home from worship. They discuss how many of their friends have sold their property and have given the proceeds to the needy. They don’t really want to give, but feel compelled to do so. Ananias comes up with a plan, to which his wife gives her consent. They will sell a piece of property, claiming that it sold for less than they received. They will give a determined amount to the church and will keep the rest for themselves. And they will do so as if the proceeds were all that they had received for the sale of their property. They will thus give to the poor, keep some money for their own needs, and receive praise (like others) for giving sacrificially.

Such a scheme is possible, but in my mind, it is not likely. Satan is shrewd and cunning[14](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P75_22939) and works deceitfully to bring about the downfall of believers. I would be more inclined to believe that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira came about something like this:

Ananias and Sapphira become aware of the needs that exist within the believing community, and they desire to help. They cannot help but be aware of the fact that a number of their friends have already sold property and have given the proceeds to the apostles for distribution. They purpose to sell a property they own and to give all the proceeds to the needy. They have the property appraised, and its value is assessed to be $50,000. They indicate to the apostles (and perhaps others) that they intend to sell the property and give the full amount ($50,000) to the apostles. In the course of events, several buyers are intent on buying their property, and the sale price escalates to $60,000. At the same time, they become aware of some expenses that are coming up, expenses for which they have no funds in reserve. And so they decide to keep back $10,000 and give the rest ($50,000) to the church.

Somehow, the impression remains that they are giving the entire amount of the sale to the church. At some point in time, either Ananias or his wife could have corrected this misconception, but they choose not to do so. By the time the money is placed at the feet of the apostles, Ananias clearly states that this is the full amount of the sale – an outright lie. Sapphira is later given the chance to tell the truth, but not knowing what has happened earlier, she confirms the statement(s) made earlier by her husband. The lesser amount ($50,000), she affirms, was the full amount of the sale.

Often, sin starts out as a seemingly insignificant thing (like “a little while lie”) and then grows to something far bigger. Such was the case with the pilfering of Judas. Little did he know where his pilfering would ultimately lead. Peter was present when Ananias came with their contribution. He was informed (supernaturally, I believe) of the deception and rebuked Ananias for lying to the Holy Spirit, and to the church. Since he did not pronounce sentence upon Ananias, I suspect he may have been surprised when Ananias fell dead at his feet.

When Sapphira appeared some three hours later, she was completely unaware of what had happened to her husband. Peter’s question gave her an opportunity to tell the truth and to renounce the lie they had told earlier. She chose to stick with their story and to deepen her involvement in this sin of deception. Having seen how God dealt with Ananias, Peter knew how God would now deal with his wife, and so he announced the death of Ananias and pronounced the imminent death of Sapphira. And thus she died as well.

The death of Ananias and his wife had a profound impact on the church, as well as on those outside the faith. We read in verse 5 that “**great fear gripped all who heard**” about the death of Ananias. After the death of Sapphira, we are again told that “great **fear gripped the whole church and all who heard about these things**” ([Acts 5:11](javascript:%7b%7d)). In verses 12 and 13, we are told the effect of this fear:

12 Now many miraculous signs and wonders came about among the people through the hands of the apostles. By common consent they were all meeting together in Solomon’s Portico. 13 **None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high honor** ([Acts 5:12-13](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

The saints (and particularly the apostles) were held in high regard by the unbelieving community, but as unsaved sinners, those outside the church did not have the courage to join the saints as they gathered. The holiness of God is a dreaded reality to those living in sin.

### Conclusion

Our text is brimming with implications and applications for Christians today. We will conclude by calling attention to some areas of application.

*First, our text contains much instruction regarding giving:*

*Giving is a by-product and outgrowth of Christian unity.* Our text begins with Luke’s description of the church at Jerusalem as being of “**one heart and mind**” ([Acts 4:32](javascript:%7b%7d)). Sharing flows from unity, and it also enhances unity:

27 At that time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, got up and predicted by the Spirit that a severe famine was about to come over the whole inhabited world. (This took place during the reign of Claudius.) 29 So the disciples, each in accordance with his financial ability, decided to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. 30 They did so, sending their financial aid to the elders by Barnabas and Saul ([Acts 11:27-30](javascript:%7b%7d)).

11 You will be enriched in every way so that you may be generous on every occasion, which is producing through us thanksgiving to God, 12 because the service of this ministry is not only providing for the needs of the saints but is also overflowing with many thanks to God. 13 Through the evidence of this service they will glorify God because of your obedience to your confession in the gospel of Christ and the generosity of your sharing with them and with everyone. 14 And in their prayers on your behalf they long for you because of the extraordinary grace God has shown to you. 15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! ([2 Corinthians 9:11-15](javascript:%7b%7d))

3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 I always pray with joy in my every prayer for all of you 5 because of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now ([Philippians 1:3-5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I have pointed out elsewhere that the term “**fellowship**” is frequently used in reference to sharing financially with others. Our text helps us to understand why “**fellowship**” is often financial. Fellowship is partnership. Our union in Christ makes us all partners, so we should naturally (rather, supernaturally) desire to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

*Giving need not be restricted to cash on hand.*Our text makes it very clear that we should consider all our possessions as potential resources for giving to those in need. All too often we tend to think of our giving only in terms of what is left at the end of the month. Our text in Acts should correct this kind of thinking. All our possessions are potential resources to meet the needs of others. We may have an extra car, for instance, which we can give, loan, or sell to help a brother or sister in need.

Sharing should not be limited to material possessions. We should also be liberal in giving our time, our energies, and our spiritual gifts to those whose needs we can meet.

*Giving is a form of encouragement.* Barnabas sold his property and gave the proceeds to the apostles to meet the needs of others. Luke is careful to inform us that Barnabas was known as the “**son of encouragement.**” How often a gift to one in need can be an encouragement to them. I have personally been encouraged by the gifts of others, and I have seen others who have been greatly encouraged in an hour of need by a timely gift, given in Jesus’ name. It says, “God cares about you, and so do we.”

*Christians can give for the wrong reasons.* Jesus warns us about giving for the wrong reasons in [Matthew 6:1-4](javascript:%7b%7d):

1 “Be careful not to display your righteousness merely to be seen by people. Otherwise you have no reward with your Father in heaven. 2 Thus whenever you do charitable giving, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in synagogues and on streets so that people will praise them. I tell you the truth, they have their reward. 3 But when you do your giving, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your gift may be in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you” ([Matthew 6:1-4](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Organizations, individuals, and even churches can solicit funds by appealing to wrong motivations.*It is sad to say that there are all too many who appeal for funds or donations by appealing to motives which are unbiblical. Sometimes giving becomes a kind of competition to see who can give the most (and receive praise from men for doing so). Sometimes people are prompted to give by the promise of getting something in return (which might even be a plaque, displayed in a prominent place – hardly preventing your left hand from knowing what the right is doing). The unscrupulous may solicit contributions from people (including the very poor) by promising that God will reward them many fold with riches. We should be very careful not to cause a brother to stumble by tempting him with improper motivations for giving.

*Giving should be with singleness of purpose.*Our text helps me to better understand Paul’s instructions in the Book of Romans, chapter 12:

6 And we have different gifts according to the grace given to us. If the gift is prophecy, that individual must use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is service, he must serve; if it is teaching, he must teach; 8 if it is exhortation, he must exhort; **if it is contributing, he must do so with sincerity**; if it is leadership, he must do so with diligence; if it is showing mercy, he must do so with cheerfulness ([Romans 12:6-8](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Translations differ significantly in [Romans 12:8](javascript:%7b%7d). The term rendered “**with sincerity**” by the NET Bible is rendered “**with liberality**” in the NKJV. The ESV renders it “**in generosity**”; the NIV “**generously**.” The King James Version renders it, “**with simplicity**,” and this is the translation I prefer. When I looked up the Greek term *haplotes* in my Greek Lexicon, I found this definition:

“Of simple goodness, which gives itself without reserve, ‘without strings attached’, ‘without hidden agendas.’”[15](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P101_32546)

I believe that “simplicity” or “singleness and sincerity of motive” leads to generosity. It seems clear to me that Ananias and Sapphira had dual (and even opposing) motives for their gift, which led to their hypocrisy. They were seeking to meet the needs of others while at the same time seeking their own carnal need for recognition.

*Second, our text challenges the “prosperity gospel,” so popular today.*The “Good Life Gospeleers” promise health, wealth, and prosperity to those who are spiritual, and especially those who are “spiritual” (generous) in their giving (to the one making this promise). Our text teaches otherwise. Think of it; this was the early, pristine New Testament church. The church in Jerusalem is made up of Spirit-filled Christians who are bold in proclaiming their faith and generous in their giving. But the fact is that the church has many members who are poor.[16](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P104_34105) They are Spirit-filled people, and yet they are poor. The whole church is not rich, as the “prosperity gospel” preachers promise us. God does not make everyone in the church rich; He provides for the essential needs of His people through the sacrificial giving of other saints. The saints who give money lay it at the feet of the apostles, to give to the poor. Thus Peter can honestly say to the beggar in chapter 3, “**I have no silver or gold**” ([Acts 3:6](javascript:%7b%7d)). Piety does not keep us from poverty, nor does it guarantee that we will be rich in this world’s goods. God does care for the poor, and so should His saints. The prosperity He grants us enables us to minister to others, knowing that at some point in time the shoe may be on the other foot:

13 For I do not say this so there would be relief for others and suffering for you, but as a matter of equality. 14 At the present time, your abundance will meet their need, so that one day their abundance may also meet your need, and thus there may be equality ([2 Corinthians 8:13-14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Third, our text underscores the necessity and importance of maintaining purity in the local church.*The church at Corinth had a member who was living in immorality with his father’s wife. Instead of being grieved and ashamed, and taking disciplinary action, the church was proud of its liberality and did nothing:

1 It is actually reported that sexual immorality exists among you, the kind of immorality that is not permitted even among the Gentiles, so that someone is cohabiting with his father’s wife. 2 And you are proud! Shouldn’t you have been deeply sorrowful instead and removed the one who did this from among you? 3 For even though I am absent physically, I am present in spirit. And I have already judged the one who did this, just as though I were present. 4 When you gather together in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I am with you in spirit, along with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 turn this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. 6 Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast affects the whole batch of dough? 7 Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch of dough – you are, in fact, without yeast. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 So then, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of vice and evil, but with the bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth ([1 Corinthians 5:1-8](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Paul was shocked and horrified by the report of this situation in the Corinthian church. They should have responded by removing this sinner from their midst. Even from a distance, Paul personally exercised church discipline, and urged the church to follow his example. Sin that is tolerated in the church corrupts the church. It must be removed, for the sake of holiness, for the sake of the sinner, for the sake of the gospel, and for the good of the church. I believe that our text in Acts is the first instance of discipline in the early church, and it is meant to teach us the necessity of maintaining purity in the church. If we take the sin of Ananias and Sapphira lightly and are shocked (as some “scholars” are) at the severity of God’s response to their hypocrisy, then it says more about us than about Peter and the church in Jerusalem.

*Fourth, we are to learn that purity in the church actually promotes growth.* Some (not all, hopefully) “seeker-friendly” churches avoid taking any disciplinary action because they fear that it will dampen the “feel-good” mood they are trying to create. They fear that the church will not grow if it takes a hard line on sin. They are wrong. True growth – growth by evangelism – takes place in the soil of purity, not in the soil of indulgence and indifference. Look at Luke’s report concerning the outcome of this (and other) events in the very next verses:

12 Now many miraculous signs and wonders came about among the people through the hands of the apostles. By common consent they were all meeting together in Solomon’s Portico. 13 **None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high honor. 14 More and more believers in the Lord were added to their number, crowds of both men and women**. 15 Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets, and put them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow would fall on some of them ([Acts 5:12-15](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

There are three “greats” in our text: “**great power**” and “**great grace**” ([Acts 4:33](javascript:%7b%7d)); and “**great fear**” ([Acts 5:5, 11](javascript:%7b%7d)). While the term “great” is not found in verse 14 (above), I think it would be safe to say: Great power, plus great grace, plus great fear, facilitates great growth. Purity does not hinder growth; it promotes it.

*Fifth, our text reminds us how much God hates hypocrisy***.** In the final analysis, our text is not primarily about generosity, but about hypocrisy. God is not trying to scare us into giving. Ananias and Sapphira did not have to sell their property, nor did they need to give any of the proceeds of the sale to the church. They are not disciplined for “holding back” on God; they are disciplined for their hypocrisy – for lying to the church and to the Holy Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira sinned by trying to appear more pious than they were by lying about the amount of their gift.

The Gospels of the New Testament contain our Lord’s strong words of rebuke for hypocrites.[17](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P114_39635) Somehow, hypocrisy is not taken as seriously by Christians today as it was by our Lord. Perhaps one reason is because all of us are guilty of this sin, and we’d rather focus on the sins of others. But why was hypocrisy the first sin to be dealt with in the early church, and why were the consequences so severe for Ananias and Sapphira? I believe it is because hypocrisy is lying, and lying is contrary to the truth. Our Lord Jesus is the truth ([John 14:6](javascript:%7b%7d)). The Spirit of God is the “**Spirit of truth**” ([John 14:17; 16:13](javascript:%7b%7d)). It is He who “guides us into all the truth” ([John 16:13](javascript:%7b%7d)). It is the truth that sets us free ([John 8:32](javascript:%7b%7d)). We are sanctified by the truth ([John 17:17](javascript:%7b%7d)). The church is the “**support and bulwark of the truth**” ([1 Timothy 3:15](javascript:%7b%7d)). Satan, on the other hand, is a liar, and the “**father of lies**” ([John 8:44](javascript:%7b%7d)). The truth is foundational to everything that relates to the Christian faith. To tolerate lying (hypocrisy) is to undermine the church.

It is relatively easy to condemn the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira, but let us recognize that we are all hypocrites, and hypocrisy takes many forms. In our text, hypocrisy is seeking to appear more spiritual to others than you really are. One of the most popular excuses unbelievers employ to justify their rejection of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith is: “the church is full of hypocrites.” In truth, it is. The marvel is that God saves hypocrites, just as He saves liars, murderers, and the very worst of mankind:

9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, 10 thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. 11 **Some of you once lived this way**. **But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God** ([1 Corinthians 6:9-11](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

We would do well to give serious thought to the ways in which we mask our sins and seek to look more pious than we really are. Let Ananias and Sapphira be a warning to us that God hates hypocrisy.

*Sixth, while the Spirit of God indwells the church, Satan is also at work in the church***.** We should not be surprised to find the Spirit of God deeply involved in the church.

21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom **you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit** ([Ephesians 2:21-22](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

The Spirit is so much a part of the church that lying to the church is equivalent to lying to the Spirit. What is a bit more surprising is to find Satan actively involved in opposing the truth. He who is the father of lies seeks to promote falsehood in the church (compare [1 Timothy 4:1](javascript:%7b%7d)). While Satan is actively involved in promoting Ananias’ deception ([Acts 5:3](javascript:%7b%7d)), it is likewise clear that this sin originated in his own heart ([Acts 5:4](javascript:%7b%7d); [James 1:14-15](javascript:%7b%7d)). We must guard our hearts, lest Satan catch us in his evil schemes ([2 Corinthians 2:10-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Seventh, our text gives us some additional insight into the subject of the submission of the wife to her husband.* It seems clear in our text that a wife’s submission to her husband does not include participation in his sin. Sapphira should have dealt with her husband’s sin as [Matthew 18:15-20](javascript:%7b%7d) instructs. She was in no way obliged to become her husband’s accomplice in this sin. Peter gave Sapphira the opportunity to confess her role in this deception and to tell the truth. When she chose to stand by her husband in his sin, she died.

I found it interesting to note the expression Peter used in verse 9 of chapter 5:

8 Peter said to her, “Tell me, were the two of you paid this amount for the land?” Sapphira said, “Yes, that much.” 9 Peter then told her, “Why have you **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!” ([Acts 5:8-9](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

This expression, “**agreed together,**” is the translation of a Greek word from which the English word “symphony” is derived. It means to “be of one mind.” Isn’t that ironic? The “unity” of [Acts 4:32](javascript:%7b%7d) resulted in sacrificial giving to the needy. The “unity” of [Acts 5:9](javascript:%7b%7d) is a unity of a very different kind, resulting in sin and death. Here is an illegitimate unity. A wife is not obligated to support her husband in sin. Sapphira dies because she did support her husband’s sin.

Satan always has his counterfeits. I was reminded of counterfeit unity in [Proverbs 1](javascript:%7b%7d):

11 If they say, “Come with us! We will lie in wait to shed blood;   
we will ambush an innocent person capriciously.   
12 We will swallow them alive like Sheol, those full of vigor like those going down to the Pit.   
13 We will seize all kinds of precious wealth; we will fill our houses with plunder.   
14 **Join with us! We will all share equally in what we steal**.”   
15 My child, do not go down their way, withhold yourself from their path;   
16 for they are eager to inflict harm,   
and they hasten to shed blood ([Proverbs 1:11-16](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

How different this “unity” is from the unity we find in Acts. May God grant us the kind of unity which glorifies Him, and which prompts us to have fellowship with our brothers and sisters by responding sacrificially to their needs.

[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P10_232) Copyright © 2006 by Community Bible Chapel, 418 E. Main Street, Richardson, TX 75081. This is the edited manuscript of Lesson 9 in the *Studies in the Book of Acts* series prepared by Robert L. Deffinbaugh on January 1, 2006. Anyone is at liberty to use this lesson for educational purposes only, with or without credit. The Chapel believes the material presented herein to be true to the teaching of Scripture, and desires to further, not restrict, its potential use as an aid in the study of God’s Word. The publication of this material is a grace ministry of Community Bible Chapel.

[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P14_2133) I have borrowed this expression from the Disney movie, “Pollyanna.” In this film, Pollyanna encourages Reverend Ford, a “hellfire and damnation preacher” in her home town, to follow the example of her (deceased) father, who chose to preach only the “glad texts” of the Bible.

[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P22_3182) Literally “soul.”

[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P23_3703) Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the NET Bible. The NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION, also known as THE NET BIBLE, is a completely new translation of the Bible, not a revision or an update of a previous English version. It was completed by more than twenty biblical scholars who worked directly from the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. The translation project originally started as an attempt to provide an electronic version of a modern translation for electronic distribution over the Internet and on CD (compact disk). Anyone anywhere in the world with an Internet connection will be able to use and print out the NET Bible without cost for personal study. In addition, anyone who wants to share the Bible with others can print unlimited copies and give them away free to others. It is available on the Internet at: [www.netbible.org](http://www.netbible.org).

[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P29_6091) The term “**apostle**” may be applied beyond the 12, such as to Barnabas and Paul ([Acts 14:14](javascript:%7b%7d)). Also we see Philip performing signs in [Acts 8:6-7](javascript:%7b%7d). Having said this, I still believe that “**signs and wonders**” were performed by a few people, known as apostles, and not by the mainstream of believers in Jerusalem. Signs and wonders set the apostles apart, so that the gospel they defined, declared, and defended would be recognized as authentic and authoritative.

[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P31_7016) Admittedly, the word “**great**” is not found here, but it is not an exaggeration to say that “great unity” was evident in the Jerusalem church.

[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P35_7945) Luke uses the word grace (*charis*) 25 times – 8 times in Luke and 17 times in Acts. Elsewhere in the Gospels, this term is found only 3 times in John. Obviously, it is a very popular term with Paul, who employs it often in his epistles.

[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P37_8549) In [2 Corinthians 8](javascript:%7b%7d) and 9, Paul uses *charis* (grace) several times in reference to giving, but this is somewhat exceptional.

[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P38_8696) In [Acts 2:44](javascript:%7b%7d) and 4:32, Luke uses the related adjective, *koinos*, when speaking of the church having all things in common.

[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P54_14559) Gamaliel, Paul’s mentor ([Acts 22:3](javascript:%7b%7d)) is introduced to us in [Acts 5:34](javascript:%7b%7d).

[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P58_16426) When I think of Barnabas, I am reminded of Joseph during his unjust period of imprisonment. Had he been feeling sorry for himself, Joseph would probably have not been alert to the needs of the “butler” and the “baker,” who were fellow-inmates (see [Genesis 40](javascript:%7b%7d)).

[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P62_18335) For example, the verbs “**sold**” (verse 1) and “**kept back**” (verse 2) are third person singular – “**He**” (Ananias did this). “**You**” and “**your**” in verses 3 and 4 are singular, not plural.

[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P64_19141) Because of marriages like that of Ahab and Jezebel (see [1 Kings 21:25](javascript:%7b%7d)), we may be tempted to think that Sapphira prompted her husband to carry out this deception. Luke, however, seems to point to Ananias as the initiator of this sin.

[14](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P75_22940) [Genesis 3:1](javascript:%7b%7d).

[15](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P101_32547) *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.* Third Edition, Copyright © 2000 by The University of Chicago Press. Later in the article, this same Lexicon rejects the definition of “liberosity” or “liberality”: “The interpretation *generosity, liberality* has frequently been proposed for [**Ro 12:8**](javascript:%7b%7d)**;** [**2 Cor 8:2; 9:11, 13**](javascript:%7b%7d)(w. support sought in TestIss 3:8 [s. RCharles, Test12Patr, 1908, on TestIss 3:1, 2, 8]; Kaibel 716, 5=IG XIV, 1517 [s. L-S-J-M s.v. II, 3]), but this sense (adopted by NRSV et al.) is in dispute, and it is prob. that mng. 1 in the sense of *sincere concern, simple goodness* is sufficient for all these pass.”

[16](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P104_34106) We shall see this once again in the early verses of [Acts 6](javascript:%7b%7d).

[17](https://bible.org/seriespage/9-subtraction-leads-multiplication-first-instance-church-discipline-acts-432-511" \l "P114_39636) [Matthew 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13](javascript:%7b%7d)ff, 23, 25, 27ff; 24:51; [Mark 7:6; 12:15](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 6:42; 12:1, 56; 13:15](javascript:%7b%7d).