

# The Unwavering Church

Walks with Integrity

October 19, 2025

Acts 4:32 - 5:11

## Pastoral Prayer (Acts 17)

Father, You are the Maker of heaven and earth—everything we see and everything we can't. You are not confined to buildings or dependent on our hands, for You Yourself give life and breath to all things. Every heartbeat, every sunrise, every nation, and every moment of history moves according to Your design. From one man, You created all peoples, setting the boundaries of their lands and the seasons of their lives so that we might seek You and find You—not because You are far off, but because You are near. In You we live and move and have our being. We exist because You will it, and we worship because You are worthy. You are the source, the sustainer, and the purpose of all life, and we adore You.

As we draw near to Your throne, we are reminded how easily our hearts wander. We confess that we have loved comfort more than holiness, approval more than obedience, and our own plans more than Your will. We've spoken words that wounded, nursed thoughts that poisoned, and neglected the very grace that sustains us.

### ***(Pause for congregational confession)***

Forgive us, Lord. Cleanse us from secret sins, the ones that others can't see but You know full well. Create in us clean hearts and renew steadfast spirits within us. We don't stand before You with excuses or achievements but with empty hands and contrite hearts. Thank You that, because of Christ, our failures do not have the final word—Your mercy does. Your grace that never runs dry.

You have surrounded us with blessings too many to name—family, friendships, the fellowship of believers, the beauty of creation, and the hope of eternal life. Thank You for the quiet ways You provide: the breath we just took, the meal that awaits us, the comfort of Your Spirit in our sorrow, the guidance of Your Word when we are lost. Thank You for the cross that silences our guilt and the resurrection that assures our future. Even in trials, You are shaping us for joy.

Lord, we bring before You our needs, the needs of your church, the needs in our community, nation, and world. Strengthen those who are weary, comfort those who mourn, and heal those who suffer.

### ***(Pause for congregational requests)***

Let Your kingdom come—first in us, then through us. Teach us to walk humbly, to love mercy, and to do justice in Your name. And in all things, remind us that we are not our own but Yours—redeemed, restored, and sent for Your glory. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

## Introduction

**(TITLE SLIDE)** This week, for the first time in months, I've exercised 6 days in a row, about 45 minutes of circuit training for 5 of those days, and a 30 minute hilly walk through our neighborhood on Saturday. I REALLY need to do this every week, but even after just one week, I feel SO MUCH BETTER. Sore for a few days, for sure, but overall, way better mood, way better energy levels, sleeping better, lower anxiety, and so on.

I'm really grateful that the Lord created us in such a way that we can often see or feel an impact early on when we take on a new endeavor. We don't get instant FINISHED results. You can't tell that I exercised at all this week. But we do experience progress from the very beginning.

## Body

Similarly, as we are working our way through Acts, we are seeing some of the ways the gospel has impacted the lives of the early Christians. I'm not talking so much about what they did when they gathered (that was two weeks ago) as much as I am the personal changes that took place in individuals and families.

In fact, if you look at Acts 4:32ff (the text that leads up to our text today), you can see at least two ways the gospel was impacting the first Christians. Look at v. 32.

***(Slide) Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common. (Acts 4:32, CSB)***

Notice the two ways that the gospel was changing lives. **The first change was that it made community with other Christians of first importance.**

## Illustration

It's October, and I learned this week that during October, more single people enter into committed relationships than in any other month. It's like we feel that first morning in the 50's, and we think, "Ooo, I need someone to cuddle and watch bad Christmas movies with." So we commit. This phenomenon has a slang name in our culture. We call it "cuffing season" ... that time of year when single folks are more likely to "cuff" themselves to another.

That's something like the early impact of belief in Jesus. It "cuffs" you to other people. You want to do life together. You want community. You want to be engaged in relationships. You want to humbly serve. This is an early result of belief.

Not only does belief result early on in a desire for relationships and community, it also **loosens our relationship with things**. Look at the rest of v. 32.

*(Slide) Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common. (Acts 4:32, CSB)*

Now, as I pointed out in my sermon two weeks ago, this was not communism or socialism. This was **spiritual communalism**. What changed as a result of the gospel was that **rather than finding their joy in what they possessed, they found joy in generosity**. Don't miss this! An early result of belief in Christians is a **loosened relationship with money for selfish purposes in exchange for using it for generous purposes**. Belief in Jesus leads to joyful generosity.

## Illustration

*(SLIDE - Logos)* In our day, we are not strangers to being tightly tied to our possessions. If you've ever walked into Costco for milk and a rotisserie chicken and come out with a kayak and an enormous teddy bear, then you know what I mean. But more and more we spend our money on services and experiences. Our strip malls are filled with places to have things done to us and things done for us. If Door Dash is a normal part of your week, you are probably more tied to services than you'd like to think. And let's don't even think about Amazon Prime.

Try cancelling one subscription today, or try and go 24 hours without buying anything, and perhaps you'll get a sense of how tied you are to possessions or services. The point is that belief in Jesus has a way of loosening that bond such that joy comes not from what we possess but from what we give in support of the mission. Belief in Jesus leads to joyful generosity.

*(TITLE SLIDE)*

So, in v. 32 we see that believing in Jesus creates a bond of love to people very early on after your salvation, and that it also leads to a loosening of our bond to possessions or experiences. The gospel impact very early on in our faith is that it leads to a love for life together and for joyful generosity.

And to help us see what this looks like, Luke tells us two stories. The first is about a man who truly experienced the gospel and freely loved and freely gave. The second is about a couple who tried to fake it.

First, let's read vv. 34-35 that set the stage.

*(Slide) 34 For there was not a needy person among them because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of what was sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet. This was then distributed to each person as any had need. (Acts 4:34-35, CSB)*

Luke points to how people in the church (perhaps more specifically, those who were landlords) gave freely and voluntarily to the church so that its leaders could use those funds to help those in need. Luke is not prescribing how generosity should work in the church today, but describing how a love for one another and the mission led to this kind of joyful generosity. Then he gives us the first example. Look at vv. 36-37.

*(Slide) 36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus by birth, the one the apostles called Barnabas (which is translated Son of Encouragement), 37 sold a field he owned, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:36-37, CSB)*

## Barnabas

Now, if you're on the Bible reading plan and using your devotional book, then you already know a lot about Barnabas. Barnabas shines as one of the most mature, reliable, loveable leaders of the early church. This passage shows us how Barnabas' trusted ministry began: with a demonstrated freedom from the love of things, and a heart of love for the needy in the church. He sold his field and gave all the proceeds to the apostles. In Luke's mind, Barnabas is the primo example for the way true faith in Christ creates a bond of love for people and cuts a bond of love for things.

## Ananias and Sapphira

Ananias and Sapphira in chapter 5 are the anti-Barnabas. They were people who had not really been changed by the gospel, but they wanted to look like they had been. They wanted to be known for it, but they didn't want to be it. They wanted to look like, in the eyes of the church, that Christ was their satisfaction and joy. They wanted some visible place in the church. Their joy and satisfaction wasn't in God, wasn't in the people of the church, wasn't in the mission of the church, but was in being known as people who looked like their joy was all of those things.

In short, they were people who **did not walk with integrity**. By selling a field for one price and giving some of the proceeds **as if they were giving all of the proceeds**, Ananias and Sapphira demonstrated that they did not walk with integrity.

What did that lack of integrity look like? If we look carefully at the text, we can see three things.<sup>1</sup>

1. *(SLIDE) They loved their money.* Look at vv. 1-2. *A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property. However, he kept back part of the*

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<sup>1</sup> Derived from Piper, John. Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999). Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007. Sermon, 1991.

*proceeds with his wife's knowledge, and brought a portion of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 5:1-2, CSB).*

- a. You can just picture the scenario, right? They liquidate an investment and hold the cash in their hands, and if they didn't decide before they certainly decided then to keep some of it back but still act like they were giving it all away. And that leads me to number 2.
2. **(SLIDE) They coveted the praise of men.**
  - a. They wanted to look more generous than they really were. They wanted the apostles to think that they were like Barnabas. They wanted to look like Christ was their satisfaction and joy. They wanted some visible place in the church along those lines. So they combined their love for money and their love for praise and gave something, but not what they purported to give. Which leads me to number 3.
3. **(SLIDE) They lied to the church and to God.** Look at vv. 3–4. ***“Ananias,” Peter asked, “why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds of the land? Wasn't it yours while you possessed it? And after it was sold, wasn't it at your disposal? Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart? You have not lied to people but to God.”***
  - a. To cover their covetousness, and to give the impression of generosity, they lied. **(SLIDE) If you love possessions and you love the praise of men, you will lose your love for truth.**

## Hypocrisy and Holiness

Now, if you're not already uncomfortable, you certainly will be when you consider that the Lord took the lives of Ananias and Sapphira in plain view of the Apostles and of others watching. And perhaps you are feeling very unsettled because you, too, are or have been a hypocrite. So, let me give you a little bit of clarity here.

**Ananias and Sapphira did not drop dead because God takes the life of all hypocrites.**

Were that the case, you would not have been able to get into the building this morning, and even if you had tried, you probably would have been killed in the car on the way over. **The reason they dropped dead is because God wanted to give a stunning warning to the whole church that phony Christians will all end up this way, sooner or later.**

**God means for you and I to fear hypocrisy. He means for us to be afraid of treating Him like He is not holy.** (SLIDE) Notice at the end of verse 5, after Ananias had died: ***When he heard these words, Ananias dropped dead, and a great fear came on all who heard.*** Then again in verse 11 after Sapphira died, ***Then great fear came on the whole church and on all who heard these things.***

**We cannot walk as if God winks at sin or shrugs at hypocrisy.**<sup>2</sup> When we walk as if God is not holy, we begin to invent a god of our own making—one who tolerates hypocrisy, excuses

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<sup>2</sup> R C Sproul.

compromise, and never asks us to change. (SLIDE) **An abundance of grace in Jesus the Son does not equate to an absence of holiness in God the Father.**

When the holiness of God fades, worship becomes casual (your heart, not your clothes), integrity becomes optional, and grace becomes cheap.

When we recover the holiness of God, obedience becomes joy, repentance becomes freedom, and the church regains her power to live with unwavering integrity before a watching world.

## Conclusion/Application

(SLIDE - **Grace for the Hypocrite**) If you're not a follower of Jesus, Acts 5 isn't here to scare you away—it's here to **wake you up**. God's holiness is not meant to destroy you; it's meant to **drive you to grace**. The same God who exposed Ananias and Sapphira is the God who invites you to honest faith. You don't have to fake devotion, impress anyone, or pretend to have it all together. ***Christ was struck down in your place so you wouldn't be. He died to forgive hypocrites and restore the broken.*** If you will turn to Him in repentance and faith, you will find not condemnation, but cleansing; not death, but life.

(SLIDE - **Integrity before a Holy God**) If you belong to Christ, this passage calls you to **walk with integrity before a holy God**. Are there corners of your life where you've tried to appear more generous, more committed, more spiritual than you really are? **God doesn't need your performance—He desires your honesty. True holiness is not perfection; it's authenticity before a gracious God that asks Him to reveal where your love for comfort, possessions, or praise has crowded out love for Him.** And remember: **the gospel doesn't just forgive hypocrisy—it frees you from it.** When you see the holiness of God and the mercy of the cross together, integrity stops being pressure to perform and starts being joy from the heart.

(SLIDE - **A Holy Church in a Watching World**) Beech Haven, the world doesn't need a polished version of Christianity—it needs a holy one. **When we walk with integrity, when our generosity is joyful and our community genuine, we display a God who is real and radiant.** Let's be a church that trembles at His holiness and rejoices in His grace—a people of open hands, honest hearts, and unwavering hope. When the fear of God shapes us, Athens sees a holiness that is humble, a generosity that is contagious, and a community that cares.