

# True and False Piety (Acts 4:32-5:11)

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[ 0 : 00 ] 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. With great power, the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and such grace was upon them all.

There were no needed persons among them, for from time to time, those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales, and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 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.

Then Peter said, Ananias, how is it that Satan has so fooled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold?

[ 1 : 11 ] 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. When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died, and great fear seized all who heard what had happened.

Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body and carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later, his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?

Yes, she said, that is the price. 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. 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. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

All right. Thank you. What a text to preach on. Thank you, Pastor William, for giving me this great job. All right.

[ 2 : 27 ] Imagine. This is where we did not take offerings, all right? If we pass on the offering bags, then suddenly two people drop dead in a church. What are you going to do, right?

Recently, I've been kind of reflecting on my ministry and my following the Lord in the last 40 years, 40-something years, when the Lord first called me and didn't know what to do.

And I haven't, I think, as I reflect back these years, I've done something, but I also failed a lot. I think it's not what we do that count.

It's how at heart, our heart, are we truthful to God? I think that counts. I think following the Lord and serving the Lord is like running a marathon.

42 Ks. Like here to run over to Harbour Bridge and come back? Yeah, that's about right. I think the Googles is about right, that distance. So you don't dash the 100 meter, you know, fall on.

[ 3 : 32 ] And then after 200 meters, you have no more energies, right? So we need to pace ourselves. But all these times, we need to be truthful. Truthful, okay?

1991, there was this, in the newspaper, the headline was, track a marathon and poster foiled by a mustache.

What did it mean? So actually, the thing was, it was this, in Brussels, okay, the capital of Belgium. Yeah. It was this marathon, very, very famous. Okay, all these international runners joined in, and they were top, top, top people. And this guy, Tihami, from Algeria, won it easily.

But something happened, someone just noticed, hey, something wrong. This guy, Tihami, when he started, obviously he would be one of the notable runners, he kind of, they kind of recognized, this guy had a mustache.

[ 4 : 44 ] But when he finished, at the end, his mustache is gone. What happened? It was, actually, they found out, it was his coach, all right, started the race for him, at the beginning.

And somehow, you know, 42 k's, there's bound to be some areas, some spots, that, there was no spectators, and there'll be some, you know, some round corners, behind the bush.

And that was exactly what happened. There's seven miles down the road, his coach finished that first seven miles, and then, Tihami was behind the bush, and his coach passed on to the number flag, to him, and he just ran on.

Now, now imagine, international marathons, under five minute mile, right? And if you have run, someone have run, five, five, seven miles under five minutes for you, and then you start on the eighth mile, of course, you will, you will win it quite easily.

And he thought, he could have, gone without notice. But no. And he, and his coach, was banned from Brussels marathon, from forever and ever.

[ 6 : 02 ] I think, I think that, that's something that's to teach us. We think, we can impose, to others. Oh, I'm pretty spiritual.

I love the Lord. I give you all my, all my, all I have, Lord. And people say, you know, to see, see us, oh, he's pretty pious. But God knows. And this is what happened, in this passage here.

Right? Right? Ananias, and his wife. Can you imagine? Everybody was giving all they have. It would be, it would be pretty, pretty awesome church.

And he, I think he and his wife, also wanted that kind of, oh, yes, we want to be, loving God. We want to do the same. but then, they, they were stuck there.

And they, wanted a way out. But that, really costed their lives. So let us, have, you know, think about this passage. Acts, we've just read that passage before.

[ 7 : 10 ] I think, I think Luke, when he was, writing this, he was, recording that, that sharing in the giving of the believers, enriched the early church.

That was what he said, in the, in the text itself. But there was this couple, who conspired, deception, resulted, in immediate death. Now that, that would be shocking.

You know, I was, if I was, Peter, just witnessed these things, just said one word, one, one phrase, and then, one died, and said something more, and then, and his wife died as well.

That, no wonder, the passage said, it was fear, amongst the people. I'm sure, if it happened here in PCBC, I'm sure, more than fear.

Okay. Right. But I think, I think, when Luke recorded this passage here, in Acts, I think God, would want to speak to us today, oh, genuine devotion, blesses the church, especially in 432 onwards.

[ 8 : 16 ] But fake piety, brings destruction. That's in chapter 5, 1 to 11. May the Holy Spirit speak to us all. No matter how, how long we have served, or how long we have been in church, or whatever we do for the Lord, I think the Lord really see, what's inside here.

It's not, how much we have done, how, what sort of spectacular things, we have experienced.

Right. I think the Lord sees our heart.

Okay. Exciting. Exciting things happen in Acts. Okay. In the past month or so, we started Book of Acts.

You see, in chapter 2, the birth of the church. Wow, the Spirit came. Right. And it was, it was, it was evangelism. It was conversions.

It was 3,000. But then, immediately, there was oppositions. All right. I think last week, Casey preached about chapter 4.

[ 9 : 23 ] All right. But, even with that, oppositions, that, that didn't stop their, their prayers to God. And God answered their prayers, by, you know, shaking the ground.

Right. And they knew, because they were praying, Lord, strengthen your servants, so that we can have courage, and boldness to preach. And, and please, work signs and wonders, as we preach.

And, and the Lord just shook the ground, and they knew, that their prayers were heard. All right.

But, immediately, after that, internal problems. Ananias, and Sapphira.

All right. They deceived God. But that didn't stop God's work. They overcome with it. You see, you see, at the end, the, yes, there was, there was fear.

But they didn't, that, that didn't stop the gospel spreading. That didn't stop the growth of the church. I think that's something, that's really, really telling, you know, in the past 30 years in PCBC, we have been through ups and downs, the roller coasters, just like that.

[10:34] Okay. We haven't experienced, the opposition, or persecution, yet, yet. All right. We, we'll see how the Lord will lead us. But we've been through, you know, good times, and bad times, successes, and failures.

Maybe more failures and successes. But the Lord has been good. Yeah. So, you see in the, in the, in the book, book of Acts, if you, if you, you seek that word, the word, word, okay, logos.

It was time to time, it was describing, the word was advancing, advancing, advancing, despite all these circumstances happened. The word was keeping, advancing from Jerusalem, through Samaria, Judea, to the ends of the, the earth, that was Rome at the time, chapter 28.

So, the word and the Holy Spirit was, keep working and, and, and advancing. But they, it, it was through a bunch of, fragile, fallible, weak people, like, us, at that time.

So, why do I love the church? Yeah, the church has a lot of failures. I mean, I failed the church, and the church failed me. Sure, there have been frustrations, there have been, all sorts.

[12:01] But why do we, love the church? Because, Jesus, is the Lord, of the church. Surely, we are all sinners.

we are forgiven sinners, all right? And we cannot expect this, like, heaven. Right? This is not hell, certainly, but this is not heaven.

All right? We are sinners, gathering together. Surely, we, that's why the, the New Testament teaches us, to forgive one another, to forbear one another, to, to accept one another, because we are sinners.

We're on our ways, to heaven. We're, we're following the Lord, right? We have our, our shortcomings. But, why do we, love the church?

Why do we serve? Why do we, why do we want to bless the church? Because, Jesus, is the Lord, of the church. Because, Jesus died, for the church. I love the Lord, therefore, I will love the church.

[13:08] So, let's, let's have a look, how do we do that? Okay? Genuine devotion, blesses the church. See, in, 433, 434, 435, with great power, the, apostles, continue, to testify, to the resurrection, of the Lord Jesus, and God's grace, was so powerfully, at work, in them all.

And, there were no needy persons, amongst them, for, from time to time, there were those who, owned land, or houses, sold them, brought the money, from the sales, and put it, at the apostles feet, and it was, distributed, to anyone, who had needs.

And, actually, in verse 44, or 32, which I've forgotten, to place on there, verse 42, you can see, all the believers, were one, in heart, and mind.

No one claimed, that any of their possessions, was their own, but they shared, everything, they had. Oh, thank you very much, I've forgotten, about that.

Right, I think, when you see, especially, the last phrase, in verse 34, 32, you say, oh, the church, we need to share, everything together, and we need to sell, our lands, and houses, this, I'm not coming to church, I'm not going to give it to you, come, where's your newest BMW, sell them, bring it to the pastor's feet.

[14:42] Of course, the true church of Jesus, do not, do not, need you to do that. Right, it's only the fake ones, you give all the money, to the church.

All right, but, this is a very descriptive, passage. What it means, it was describing, something happened.

It's not a prescriptive, passage, that you must do this. We, we know the difference, right? So, Luke was, was, purely, describing, describing, what was happening, at the time.

Okay, I think, why they, I think we need to know, why they shared everything together, why they, they would sell the land, and houses, and brought it to the, the apostles' feet.

The important thing, would be the, in the first two sentences, in verse 32, all the believers, were in one heart, and mind. Why?

[15:48] How? Because, they were, the lives were changed. by the death, and the resurrection, of Jesus. Just like, the sermon, that preached, by Peter, in chapter 4, and in chapter 2.

Because of that, the mentality, was changed. No one, claimed that, any of their possessions, was their own.

Because, they had something, greater. They have, something more precious. So, all these material stuff, seems, not so important. Do you experience that?

I experience that. Not saying that, I, I don't need, the money, or, or, material stuff, but, it's not, as, important, as, as I, hold on to, so tightly.

Now, if you guys, if some of you guys, you married here, you would know, you would know what I'm saying. Okay? Prior to your marriage, all right?

[16:58] Okay, Gary, you would, he pointed to you, you would just, I would just, go where I want to. I would just, spend the money, whatever I want to.

I would just, you know, hang out with, whoever I wanted to, male or female, right? You don't do it now, right? Of course not.

You know what I mean? When you have something, more precious, or more important, in your life, other stuff seems to be, less, of concern.

I think we all need, priorities, right? And we all need, focus. Even you have your, your phone, right? I say, if I want to, take a shot, just like that, okay?

If I don't, I mean, this has auto, auto focus, right? But, even that, if I take it too soon, it's not focused, I mean, what kind of photos is that? We need to have focus, in our lives.

[18:06] And, when we, experience the Lord, the most precious Lord, in my life, every other thing seems to be, less of importance.

This is what happened. Because they, truly experienced, the transformation, from the death, and the resurrection, of the Lord.

These possessions, seems to be, not so important. And, and they saw needs. And, very naturally, they just expressed, and, and, and put them into actions.

No one told them to. I'm sure, the apostles, suddenly, they found, well, how come so many people, bring money? They didn't know what to do.

The simple thing was, oh, who had needs? Okay, we just distribute them, to, to those who had needs. And, they did not do well. And, then, later, in this chapter six, you know, they didn't do well.

[19:11] They, the distribution was not, you know, wasn't evenly done. And, that's why there was complaints. So, there was not an organization, there was not a structure, already set there, and people, come, come, come, bring your money, come, come, if not, kick you out.

No, it was not, nothing like that. So, Luke simply described, the people, the hearts of the people changed. And, that's, that's what they knew, to bring their stuff, and to help others.

That's the expression. All right? Same thing, it was in chapter two. Luke described it twice. All right? So, when we look at it today, you know, don't, don't, please don't misunderstand.

Can you help me with the next slide? It's stuck, stuck there. All right? Selling up their properties, okay? It was, it was voluntary.

Okay? Okay? It was spontaneous. And, it was temporary. So, it was not, something that, every Christian, must, do.

[20:24] So, Luke, simply, described, the phenomenon, at the time. But, the important thing was, people's heart, was changed, by the faith, and the, resurrected, Lord.

I think, I think that, that's why, the early church, was so exciting, so loving. And, we can, we, I'm sure that, the same Lord, the same spirit, the same word, is with us.

Right? And, we can, we can, work, live this out as well. I've been reminded of that. I've been reminded of this. Now, I'm not advertising for these guys, okay?

But, there are only three, supermarkets, you know, grocery stores, you can buy vouchers, okay?

About this time last year, it was, the church members, beginning to, you know, test it positive, and, and, and, they had to stay home.

It was more, actually, it was more tense, last year, this time last year, right? So, there are people, realizing that, oh, there are people, falling sick, and they, they couldn't work, and some business, you know, their own businesses, they had to close.

[21:42] So, what can we do? Very spontaneous, really out of their heart. Pastor, I really want to do something, but I don't know what to do. I felt that the Lord, inspired me to, give some money.

I didn't know what to do. Okay, okay. Actually, this guy asked me, twice, three times, I didn't know what to do, you know? And then, somehow, the same spirit, inspired others.

There were, more, more money came in. It was, five figures, right? It was a fair bit. So, I talked to the deacons, and the pastors, what should we do?

And then, because as a church, as a, a charitable, charitable organization, we've got to be very careful, with, you know, using the money, through the church, to help, because, the RLD wouldn't like it.

So, we, kind of, resolved to, the, the deacons board, authorize me, and two other deacons, to handle this. So, they, they trusted us, and us three, will hold ourselves accountable, all right?

[ 22 : 57 ] And then, to, to, how, how do we use the money, and to distribute, and, actually, while we're doing that, more, more money came in. Even, we still have a few, few hundred dollars left, after a year, right?

And, many people has, has been helped. You know, when I, when I was distributing, was, was, sometimes, I was, I, I bought vouchers, sometimes, it was cash, sometimes, actual groceries. When I was sending this, these, to, to the home, to different homes, when I was driving to those homes, I was in tears, you know, I tell you. You will see the beautiful, love of God, working amongst his people.

I was very moved. And, I, I thank the Lord, I got the, I got the, this, good job, of, of, sending the love of God, to his people.

It was because, all the believers, no one claimed that, any of their possessions, was their own. that is the attitude. It's not, it's not the outcome.

[ 24 : 12 ] I mean, we can do, we can, we can, big, do a big project, but if we, if the attitude's not right, God is not pleased.

But if our attitudes are right, even, you know, we fall flat, with a, with a project, God can still use it. Right?

So let's, let's set our attitude right, before the Lord. Be genuine. Five, five loaves and two fish. He can still use to feed thousands. It's not, what, how much we have. is how genuine, we are. Okay? Was this Barnabas, at the end, was the, the figure, that pointed out? Yeah. He gave everything. And the Lord, was pleased.

[ 25 : 17 ] And later on, later on, God used Barnabas, to help, Paul. That, is the kind of attitude, God can use. Right? But the thing is, fake, piety.

That's the complete opposite, the contrast, to the, chapter four. This, couple, Ananias, Sapphira, they, kept, back, part of the money.

Now, they didn't have to give, they didn't have to sell, no, no one, pressured them to, no one, pressured them to give all. It, it was their own, willingness to do that.

But, imagine, this couple, you know, they were taught, they were in the church. They were saying, oh, look at Barnabas. Oh, wow, he sold everything. He placed everything. Oh, wow, how wonderful. How godly. And somehow, in their, in their heart, in their pride, people knew, knew that we were, wealthy as well. Oh, yeah, we can sell our properties.

[ 26 : 23 ] Okay, we sold, they sold their properties. And then, and then, they struggled. Should we give all? I don't have that much faith.

If we give, give them all now, if we get old, who's going to look after us? But if we don't give, we already told them, we're going to give.

What, what, what are we going to do? Let's keep part of the money. And that was the problem. I'm sure if they, if they told the apostles, we're only giving some parts, we're keeping some of them, I'm sure that wouldn't be a problem.

Because, as said, it was not compulsory, right? It was really out of their willing hearts. But I think that the struggle was, they deceived, they let Satan to enter into their heart.

Deception, always allow Satan to have a foothold. And notice, Peter said, you did not lie to us. You lied to God.

[ 27 : 38 ] You tested the Holy Spirit. It's not to men. It's to God. So that was the problem.

I think, I think, we need to be very, very careful, all right? Truthful heart. We need to be, this is our attitude, this is our attitude to God.

I think, as I said, in the past many years, I'm not a very gifted person. I don't have this kind of dynamics, I have to lead big stuff, you know.

But one thing, I need to keep constantly reminding myself, need to be truthful. Need to be truthful. What he, he, I mean, different people will have different talents, okay?

But if he give me 50, I'll just, with a 50, I will let God to multiply. Okay? I don't want to pretend, we don't need to pretend, to be someone else, and do something great.

[ 28 : 52 ] We don't copy and paste. I think, always, there was a temptation, of pretending, and deceiving. All right? Now, this cap back, this word, very interesting.

Some commentators, related, this cap back, this, this word, in Greek, was the same word, this story, of Achan, in Joshua 7, when he took, the devoted things, when they were entering, Canaan. Remember, the story? All right? Because, Israel was embarking, a new journey, going into Canaan, and, God did not allow them, to have any sin, to contaminate them.

So, Achan, took, that devoted thing, that was something, that was an abomination, to God, and God had to do, had to act.

It seemed to be quite, a severe punishment, right? But, because for the whole, of Israel, God could not, turn a blind eye, to the sin.

[ 30 : 08 ] Same thing here. Same word. And, that word, cap back, can be translated, to steal. He was stealing, from God. He said, it was given all, but in fact, he stole, for what he, what he has promised to God, he stole, part of it, he kept it, for himself.

And, that deception, would affect, the whole of the church, advancement. That's why God, had to act. We may say, God, is very mean.

That's why, it's hard to preach, this text, you know? If we, if we're new believers, or we're non-believers, we think, even if we are, if we are mature believers, we still, I still struggle.

God, couldn't you, be a little bit more merciful? You know? Okay, second time to, Sophia, it was, his wife, it was a little bit better. At least, Peter said, are you sure, you have given all?

Right? But, but Ananias, there was no reply, and it was just, dropped dead right away. Right? But, I think, one head, one brain here, I say, yeah, I, I, I question.

[ 31 : 28 ] But, the other side, I say, the Lord knows what he's doing. It's, it's, it's me. It's not him. So, I think, I think, we need to, we can question, but also, we need to know, God is God.

What happened, God allowed it, yes. Yes. has to be something, that was wrong. And for, and, and God would know, what was the best, way to deal with it.

It was about two years ago, at St. Patrick's Square. I think it was maybe a couple, after a stormy night, it was this big tree, that fell, and, and kind of, fell on this car.

If that car would belong to the vicar, the vicar would have to really think, what happened to, with the church. And, and there was, people were talking about, oh, it was because of the, the rain, and the storm, the severe wind, that, that, it just, just, brought the tree down.

But then, these, specialists, the tree specialists, came in, and had a look at the tree. And they examined, and they said, no, it was not the storm, or the rain, or the wind. It was the tree itself, it rotted.

[ 32 : 54 ] It rotted, it had been rotten for a long time. Anything would bring it down. If you, carelessly, just lean on the tree, it probably will fall down. I think, in our lives, we often blame, God, why do you want to, why, why am I like this?

You know, why, why my, my faith, fail? Why am I, why am I in, in this state? Why do you allow these things happen to me?

Maybe, it's something here, started long ago. that, we couldn't face any, any trials, or tests.

Anything can bring us down. Maybe we need to examine ourselves. Are we, are we corrupted inside? We allow Satan to have a foothold in our lives?

Were there deceptions? Were there sins? Slowly, slowly, building, corrupting ourselves, ourselves.

[ 34 : 06 ] Anything, will just bring us down. But praise God, I mean, he is merciful. Surely, he, he is a just and holy God.

But he's also merciful and kind. Now, I, I often think, if God, would react to, us. Every time, he reacts, he reacted to, Ananias and his wife, we'll be dead.

After a year, becoming Christians, all Christians died. Right? Surely, I, you know, I lied to God.

Have you? Be careful what you think, man. I give my own Lord. And we, held back some, a lot of, promises.

If God, hears what you sing, what you pray, and then seeing, your life, whom, next week, we'll, we'll, we won't be here.

[ 35 : 15 ] But the Lord is merciful and kind. Praise God. I would have dead, 20 times. Right?

But God is merciful and kind, and we can come, and acknowledge, our, our weaknesses, our failures, and ask him to forgive. And surely, he will.

It's exciting to see, to read Acts. 20 years, you've been here for 20 something years, right?

Yeah, I've been in this church for 20 years, and some of us, longer, some shorter. The church has nothing to boast. We can't brag anything.

The Lord, the Lord, enable us to be here, to give us, the next generations, and the next generations, to, to, to, take up the baton, to, to proclaim his word, to bless the community.

[ 36 : 20 ] It's not us. We could have, we could have died, all of us. But it's his kindness, his mercy, that he allows us, with our, with our shortcomings, without, without, without, without limitations, without witnesses.

Let his name be praised. But let us continue to work alongside, to cooperate with almighty God, and let him work wonders.

Yeah, and, and, and, and, I'm so glad that, the Lord, brought me back, 20 something years ago, 20 something, 21 years ago, yeah, 20 years ago, yeah. And, yeah, I was glad to, to grow up, with you guys, yeah, and, and, you were, small, but now, you're leaders.

And, it's so wonderful, to know, God is work, at work, in our lives. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.