

Acts 4:29,30: *'And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, ³⁰ By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.'*

As soon as persecution began, the Apostles and other disciples became even more emboldened to preach the Word without fear or concern for their own safety. They all knew that they were in God's hands and that He would guard and protect them until the day which He had determined to take each one to Heaven.

Verse 31: *'And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.'*

This time, as they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, the place was shaken but there was no great noise, as of a mighty rushing wind and there were no 'tongues which looked like fire resting over each head'. God is free to do exactly as He pleases; He is not limited by what He has previously done, whether to repeat something or to do something completely different. No one can coerce God into doing or not doing anything; He is always free to act according to His own will, His plan and His good pleasure and always unliable to anyone!

It wasn't the shaking of the building which gave them courage to speak the Word of God with boldness; it was the empowering of the Holy Spirit: Jesus had told them: *'But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.'* Acts 1:8

Verse 32: *'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.'*

This might seem to look like communism but it is, rather, Biblical love in action. No one commanded that they share all things with each other. Jesus did command them to love one another but no one can be forced to love but, in fact, they loved each other; they cared for each other; they looked to the needs of each other.

God is Love and when He inhabits a willing disciple, the result is love: patience, kindness, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness... giving. But soon, we'll see that genuine love was not, necessarily, the motivating power within all of the new disciples.

Jesus had said, *'It is more blessed to give than to receive,'* but... that's not, in fact, recorded in any of the Gospels; We know, however, that He did say this because Paul tells the Ephesians that He had said so:

Many years after this, Paul, on his way to Rome where he will finally die, he will tell the elders at Ephesus: *'I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.'* Acts 20:35

Remember, John, in the last verse of His Gospel, tells us that Jesus did say and do many things, too numerous to have been recorded: *'And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.'*

All these Christians, in Acts 4, are loving and caring for each other.

Verse 33: *'And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.'*

With great power they were witnesses and 'great' grace was upon them all!

Great power and great grace! Who could ask for anything more!

Both the power and grace which God continues to imbue them are qualified with the Greek word: megas, which means great!... really, really, really great!

The Greek words for great power... meg'as dynamis/doo'na-mis

It's Greek meaning is: strength, power, ability/inherent power, residing in a thing by virtue of its nature...

The Greek words for great grace: meg'as char'is/khar'ese meaning: of the merciful kindness by which God, exerting His Holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian

faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues...

The greatest power in, or beyond, our Universe is God's Holy Spirit Who lives within us; He filled every Apostle, every disciple and every born again Believer. According to His Will for us, at any given moment, He is capable of guarding, protecting, energizing, empowering, strengthening, encouraging and much more and His Grace is sufficient for every moment of our lives in every situation we've ever encountered or ever will.

That is Who kept the Apostles and Who then, through the Apostles, influenced countless other souls, turning them to Christ and then filling those, who then led others to Christ, and filling all who were influenced through those new converts... all the way down to today, through to the Rapture, after which He will call to Himself, save, and seal 144,000 Jewish evangelists as He begins the whole thing again, through the Tribulation and then into and through the 1000 years of the Millennium as children born to saved parents who had lived through the entire Tribulation must then, themselves, voluntarily turn to the Savior until He finally destroys the present Heaven and Earth to create New Heavens and a New Earth wherein, finally... only Righteousness dwells forever and ever more. (131 vs 279: Eph 3-14)

Verse 34: *'Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, ³⁵ And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.'*

This does not imply that everyone sold all that they had and then poured it all into a giant community pot; we mustn't forget that all these new Believers, including the Apostles, still retained their own, personal sin-nature... as do we. We need the Holy Spirit's boundaries as we will see, just a few verses later...

The idea, here, is that those who were better-off, 'possessing extra houses or properties, did, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, Who engenders generous, giving hearts, count those Earthly riches as worthless in comparison to God's eternal riches...

And... when a person owns land, property, houses... he is chained to them... God was planning to cause great persecution to come upon all these new believers; His intent was that they be forced to leave the area, traveling, eventually, to the farthest corners of the Earth; the last thing Jesus said to them was: **'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.'** Mark 16:15

When Jesus said 'to every creature' He didn't mean animals, birds, fish, etc. He obviously meant to every human, as He did in 2Cor 5:17: *'Therefore if any man be in Christ, **he is a new creature**: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new'*

Unbeknownst to these new believers, they were being readied to leave everything behind in order to be forced out into the World.

Jesus had spoken all these preparatory things to His disciples:

He said: *'No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (money)... ²⁶ Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?... ²⁸ And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: ²⁹ And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? ³¹ Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?... for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things... ³³ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.'* Matt 6:24

He said: *'Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again'* Luke 6:38

The early Christians learned these Words of Jesus and many believed them. They loved each other and they cared for each other. When those with disposable property saw their brothers and sisters in need, many were

given the Spiritual gift of giving.

Remember: during this early time, all that the Apostles had to draw upon, were the Words which Jesus had spoken to them which the Holy Spirit was bringing back to their memories. Later, they would receive the deeper doctrines of the faith, from the Holy Spirit and also through Paul.

Paul later wrote: *'But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. ⁷ Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: ⁹ (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever.'* 2Cor 9:6

and: *'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service... distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.'* Rom 12:1/8

John wrote: *'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.'* 1John 3:16

Solomon wrote: *'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.'* Prov 19:17

God's Word is filled with the admonition for believers to care for one another... if only we really would...

Years later, Paul will write: *'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. ² Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.'* Col 3:1

The truth is, these new believers were not, yet, ready to hear and understand the deep truth and doctrines which Paul would later deliver.

Remembering his shepherding of these new believers, Peter would later write: *'Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.'* 1 Peter 2:1

Verse 36: *'And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.'*

This is the Barnabas who will later travel with Paul; we see, early on, his heart for God and for people. He sold a piece of land and brought the entire price to the Apostles, to be distributed as they thought necessary.

Barnabas had submitted his will to the Holy Spirit; he sold it, he gave it and he forgot about it. But, as is often the case... word got out. There began to be whisperings: *'Did you hear what Barnabas did? What a guy! What a blessing he is! I'll bet he'll soon be part of the Apostles' 'Inner Circle!' Ohh, I wish I had something to give, I'd like to be admired... but I don't think I'd give up alllll the money... we still have to think ahead... we should have some insurance... what if this New Thing fizzles out someday... we'd be left in the lurch!'*

Acts 5:1: *'But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, ² And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.'*

These are the ones doing that whispering or, at least, hearing it...

That's exactly what this pair did; they decided, together, to sell something... probably something not all that valuable... they weren't generous, after all, they just wanted to be thought of and whispered about as being generous... a real blessing to the group... possibly to even get into the 'Inner Circle'... to become decision makers... maybe with a brass plaque on the wall... but it didn't turn out quite like they'd planned...

Verse 3: *'But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?...''*

'Wait! What! Satan? Peter! Sir! It was Sapphira!

Verse 4a: *'While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?'*

No one told anyone to sell anything! You could have kept that thing... you could have kept all the money... Peter could have said, 'It's ok, you guys... God loves and He forgives... He's like us, don'tchaknow... He just wants us to live our best lives now... to be healthy and wealthy... go and sin no more...'

But the Holy Spirit told Peter, in that moment, just what was going to happen next!

Verse 4b: *'...why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.'*

The Holy Spirit filled Barnabas' heart to generously give as unto God.

Satan filled Ananias' and Sapphira's hearts to lie to God and to withhold from God. No one has to ever give anything to be saved but it is a fearful thing to choose to lie TO God and to then withhold what we've claimed to have given to God.

This is the earliest days of True Christianity. Just as what Barnabas had done became known, if Ananias and Sapphira had gotten away with this, it, too, would have become known, resulting in a breakdown of the rightful fear of the Holy God Who is all-seeing and all-knowing. The Holiness of God and His deserved submission from men was at stake in this moment.

Verse 5: *'And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.'*

Verse 6 *'And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.'*

They set a sheet down and then, touching only the sheet, they rolled him up in it so that they wouldn't touch the dead body: 'He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days.' Numberse 19:11

They didn't want to be ceremonially unclean; who knew when they might be needed for more clean-up...

Verse 7: *'And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. ⁸And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.'*

So, we see that Sapphira was fully complicit in this venture but Peter still offers her the chance to come clean. She comes in all happy and chipper; 'Hey Pastor Peter... how's everything? Has Ananias been here yet? We have some good news!' She can already see that all eyes are on her; soon they'll be giving her and Ananias cool new nicknames like calling Joses, 'Barnabas.' I can't wait to hear mine and have everyone start calling me that, as they envy our new intimacy with the leadership!

But Peter doesn't call her by a nifty new nickname; instead, he just asks what he already knows while she answers: Yes! That's right! By the way, I have a couple of ideas for our new nicknames ... wanna hear 'em?'

Verse 9: *'Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. ¹⁰Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.'*

What they had done, did get out and they were talked about, and famous, even... but not quite the way they had envisioned at home when they hatched their brilliant, forward-thinking plan... looks like their house and property will get sold, after all and they'll be remembered and talked about... forever!

Verse 11: *'And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.'*

I think that's a safe bet... great fear came upon everyone! No one in Jerusalem ever lied to Peter again and real estate agents were kept pretty busy for quite some time after that!

God sent His Son to die on the Cross for these people's sins and here they are despising His Person and His Sacrifice... lying and plotting with pride filled selfishness.

Temptation and sin are ever with us but:

'Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift (of His Son).' 2Cor 9:15