

Series: Committed

“Edify the Church”

Acts 4:31-5:14

Intro: As we open God’s Word, we continue in our study called, “Committed.” Throughout our study we have been reminded of the importance of being committed in our life. Commitment is important to all of us, but it is something that we don’t typically like. In fact, when asked to make a commitment, we often prefer to delay, stall, make excuses, deflect, or any other number of actions. In our human nature, we simply don’t like commitment. With commitment comes a certain level of cost, time, intentionality, focus, and sacrifice. While we rarely like to commit, the truth is that we enjoy the benefits and the blessings that come with commitment. There are very few things in life that we can grow in without some level of commitment. ****ILL:** Several years ago I was invited, along with a few other pastors, to participate in a golf tournament in Richmond. The truth is that I am not a golfer, but I was paired up with a great golfer. In fact, before being called to ministry he had a college scholarship to play golf. He was very good. Even the way the club made contact with the ball was different than anyone else on the course. For 18 holes, I got professional tips and advice from a great golfer. As a team we did well because of him. That day when the tournament ended he told me, “Matt, just commit to it and keep working on it and you will get it.” Well, as I stand before you today, I can honestly say that I am actually worse as a golfer today than I was then. Why? Because I haven’t committed to it. I haven’t invested the time, focus, or resources to be a good golfer. This decision hasn’t been because I am too busy or don’t have some time for myself, but simply because it’s just not that important to me. Golf is not a main priority in my life. ****ILL:** On the flip-side of this, I remember many years ago wanting to start a band in our youth group. We had a guy who could play the drums, another who could play the electric guitar, and another who could play the keyboard. But, we didn’t have a bass guitarist. I was used to singing, but everything sounded weird without a bass. So, I remember going to a man in our church and asking him to show me some things on the bass. He showed me three chords and told me that if I would get them down then he would teach me three more. Within a week, I felt comfortable with them, and from there he began to teach me. I remember practicing as much as I could. Why? Because I was committed to it. Within about three months, I was playing the guitar and our group was leading our youth group to praise the Lord. What was the difference in the two situations? One word – Commitment. My life was busy and I had other responsibilities, but this was a priority to me. It is amazing how much we can grow, develop, learn, and mature if we are truly committed. We see this in relationships, we see this in sports, we see this in many different ways. Our growth and development are usually directly related to our level of commitment.

Today, I have not come to preach about our commitment to a sport or a musical instrument or a specific area of education or any other such thing. I believe what God is calling us to see is how the early disciples were committed to Jesus Christ and to His Church. You can’t read the book of Acts without seeing how these early believers were devoted to Jesus and to one another. We have seen already how they were committed to Experience Jesus in Worship. Immediately after Jesus ascended into heaven the disciples gathered in the upper room for the purpose of prayer and seeking the Father’s will. From there, on the first day of the week, they went to the temple to

corporately pray and to praise God. That day the Holy Spirit came and moved and, having heard the Gospel, 3,000 people were saved and were baptized and became a part of this body of believers. From there, all throughout the book of Acts and throughout Paul's letters we see the church continuing this commitment – on the first day of the week they came together to worship the Lord and study the Scriptures so that they would experience Jesus anew in their lives. Then, we see a second commitment – they Engaged in Community. In one day, the church went from a group of 120 people in the upper room to now over 3,000 people. How do you minister to that many people? How do you equip each one of them? Acts 2:46 explains that they continued “with one mind in the temple (this is the large group), and breaking bread from house to house (the smaller communities).” In other words, they gathered in small groups from house to house for the purpose of studying the apostles' teaching, fellowship, meals, and prayer. As they engaged in community, God worked powerfully in them, among them, and through them. It is here that we pick up the story in the book of Acts as we discover a third commitment in their lives.

Show Text

It may sound strange hearing the word “edify” in the title of this message. The word “edify” isn't listed anywhere in this specific passage of Scripture. However, I believe that it is the perfect word to describe what we see taking place in Acts 4. The word “edify” literally means “to build up.” It is used around 20 times in the New Testament, and it is usually applied to the corporate body of believers, or better known as “mutual edification.” It means that in the Church we are to be ministering to one another and building one another up so that we might stand strong and continue growing in our faith. This is what Paul instructed in **1 Thessalonians 5:11**, “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.” He also explained it in **Romans 14:19** saying, “So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.” This is a part of our calling as Christians. Every member has a role to fulfill and a part to play in building up the body of Christ. One writer said this about the importance of edification, “The corporate nature of edification cannot be overemphasized. Without mutual edification, the church becomes a collection of spiritual weaklings, a perpetual nursery for spiritual infants, rather than a growing body of believers.” In other words, we each must be committed to edify the church.

As we look closely at our text this morning, we quickly see the beauty of what happens in a church when the people are committed to Christ and to edifying the church. Sadly, however, as is often the case, we quickly find that not everyone was committed to building up the church. Some, instead, were more concerned about building up their name and doing their own thing. Today's message gives a powerful picture of how God views both.

I. The Evidence of a Spirit-Filled Life (Acts 4:31-37)

As we begin the text this morning we are picking up at the conclusion of a very dramatic event in the life of the early church. Acts 3 records the day that Peter and John were going to the temple to pray when they saw a lame man begging for spare change. Peter looked at him and said, “I don't have any silver or gold, but what I do have, I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene – walk!” Immediately the man was healed. He got up and began to leap and celebrate and praise God. This provided an opportunity for Peter to preach a second sermon to point people to Jesus.

In Acts 4, we learn that the Jewish leaders didn't like Peter's message or that the lame man had been healed in Jesus' name. They arrested Peter and John and began to threaten them that they could no longer tell people about Jesus. By the time that we pick up the passage we see that they had been released to go back to the church who was gathered together praying. They told them all that had occurred, and the church began to pray further. They didn't pray for an easy road. They didn't pray for deliverance from the persecution. They didn't pray for all the trials to go away. Instead they prayed for God to give them opportunities to speak His Word with confidence, and they prayed for God to work and move in a mighty way. What a powerful testimony and example for us in how to pray. And, how did God answer? The Bible says that the place where they were gathered was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Based upon the structure of the text, everything that follows in chapter four is a direct result of the Holy Spirit's filling. To be clear, Galatians 5 tells us the fruit of the Spirit and shows us what He does in each of our individual lives, but here we see how the Holy Spirit works in the Body of Christ when He is in control.

A. They Spoke the Word of God with Boldness (vs. 31)

Now, remember that they were facing direct threats and persecutions. Peter and John, these two key disciples, had just been commanded, "Do not speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus." Remember, these are the same people who were responsible for crucifying Jesus. These threats could not be taken lightly and certainly couldn't be ignored. Anybody would have been terrified of the thought. However, now that they were filled with the Holy Spirit they were being led and controlled by the Holy Spirit of God. This resulted in a supernatural boldness to openly talk about the Lord. They openly talked about the Lord with one another. They openly talked about the Lord throughout Jerusalem. They openly and boldly talked about Jesus from house to house, from street to street, and from city to city. **Acts 14:3,7** summarizes it well, "Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands...and there they continued to preach the Gospel." They had a commitment to regularly telling the Gospel to one another and to everyone they met. In other words, telling the Good News wasn't simply the work of the apostles or of the chosen few. It was the work and the calling of the whole congregation to take the message everywhere they went. So, one of the first evidences of the Holy Spirit's control in the life of a believer is that we boldly speak the Word of God. How does that look in our lives today? We are hesitant to share the truth with one another. We are often afraid to share the truth of the Word with those that we work with or regularly interact with. However, when the Holy Spirit is in control of our lives, He will lead us and strengthen us to share the truth with boldness. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us a conviction about the Gospel and a confidence to share it with others. I pray that the Holy Spirit will be so in control of our lives that we can live and declare with the Apostle Paul, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes," **Romans 1:16a**.

B. They Surrendered All They Had to the Lord (vs. 32)

Another key evidence that they were filled with the Spirit is the way that they responded to the Lord and viewed the things that belonged to them. We saw this last week. **Acts 2:44**

says, “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common.” This is describing the amazing unity that they had in Christ. This was not man-made organizational unity. This was God-given and God-empowered spiritual unity. This is the type of unity that Jesus prayed for in John 17. This unity, though, was not simply a state of mind or a state of being. We often think of unity as a state of relationship when we are getting along together. The unity that we see modeled in Acts 4 was a great move of God that led them to a specific action. **Acts 4:32b** explains, “Not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.” This was so powerful. This means that they viewed everything that they had as a gift from God and, as a result, surrendered it to Him to use in whatever ways He saw fit.

This goes completely against the mindset of our culture. We live in such a way that we try to get all that we can, hoard it to ourselves, and then live in comfort and ease. We work hard to get all that we can, we find our identities in what we have, we are proud of it all, and sometimes even make “stuff” our god and begin to worship it. This was not the case of the early church and, frankly, shouldn’t be the case in our lives today. They didn’t view anything as their own. They viewed everything in their life as if it was something that God had entrusted to them for His purposes. As a result, there wasn’t one possession in their life that they would look at and say, “That’s mine.” They held every penny and every possession with an open hand. What would that look like today? What if you viewed your vehicle as God’s? How would you use it for Him to bring others to church, to take warm meals to those who are hungry, to help take elderly and disabled to doctor appointments, etc.? What about your house? What would be different if you viewed it as the Lord’s? How would you practice hospitality with other believers? How would you open it to your neighbors? How different would our lives be if we surrendered everything to the Lord and held it with open hands for the Lord to do with it as He pleases? Because they surrendered it to the Lord, they genuinely looked at one another and said, “What’s mine is yours.” What an incredible action of surrender, generosity, and trust.

C. They Served One Another with Gladness (vs. 34-37)

We largely see their service to one another in this passage by the way that they demonstrated generosity and consideration of one another. Verses 34-35 explain that there wasn’t a single needy person among them because there were many who had land, houses, or even common everyday possessions that they sold and gave the proceeds for the meeting of the needs. In other words, they were looking out for and meeting the needs of the church. This is what Paul had in mind in **Philippians 2:3-4** when he said, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” This is exactly what was happening in this early church. They were doing life together, and as they did, they learned of specific needs in the Body of Christ. So, what do you do when you become aware of needs in the Body of Christ? Do you ignore it and turn a blind eye? Do you reason that someone else will do it or that someone else is better qualified? Do you justify your lack of action or make excuses for

why you can't serve? These believers rolled up their sleeves and got to work. Where did they get this? This wasn't forced on them. The apostles didn't demand this of them. So, where did they learn to do this?

I believe they got this from the example that we see from Jesus in **John 13**. He was gathered in the upper room with His disciples. They had enjoyed a meal together, when Jesus was keenly aware of something. They had all met in the upper room, but nobody had been there to wash their feet when they arrived. In those days, usually the task of washing feet was reserved for the slaves. Not only that, but in Jewish culture, the task was assigned only to a Gentile slave. In other words, this need was left for the lowest person in that society. Jesus, however, was very aware that nobody had washed their feet. Jesus also knew that He came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. So, Jesus got up from the table, took off His outer coat, took a towel and a basin of water, and began to wash the filthy feet of the disciples and wipe them with the towel. It was a powerful and dramatic moment. Jesus wasn't concerned about His rights, His privileges, His position, or anything else. He was only focused on the needs of His disciples and He was clearly willing to do whatever it took to serve them. His attitude and His demeanor were so humbling that Peter asked, "Lord, why are You washing my feet? Never shall You wash my feet." Think of the irony. The living Son of God was washing the feet of a common, filthy fisherman. It was unthinkable. I imagine the room was silent and in awe at what Jesus was doing for them. Then, when Jesus finished, He looked at them and said in **John 13:13-15**, "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you."

These early believers didn't have the full story we have today, but they knew Jesus and knew how He loved and how He served. Because of this, they knew that to be like Jesus and build up His church required both service and sacrifice. Here is a major problem in much of the Church today. Somehow, we have come to believe that the Church exists for us. We come for our benefit. We come to get what we can get out of it. Please understand, I pray that when we gather you are encouraged and challenged and equipped to follow Jesus, but our primary motivation is not for us, but for Him. We come to worship Jesus, serve Jesus, and grow in Jesus. These early believers knew that if Jesus willingly gave His life for the church then there is nothing that they should be unwilling to give for His glory and for the good of His church. What about you this morning? Are you serving the Lord? Are you ministering to the Body of Christ? There are many ways that you can serve the Lord here at Crosslink. There are many ways that you can build up the Body of Christ. When we ask for you to serve and to commit and get involved, please know that we aren't simply asking you to fill a spot. We are asking you to commit to building up the Body of Christ. Many of us continually say, "No" because we reason that we are saying "no" to a spot or to a team, when in reality we are actually saying "No" to the Lord. We are saying, "No, Lord, I don't want to build up Your Body." We each have been called and gifted for the purpose of building up the Body of Christ through serving Him. **Ephesians 4:15-16** says it well, "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is

the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together **by what every joint supplies**, according to **the proper working of each individual part**, causes **the growth of the body** for the building up of itself in love.” We each have a part to play in the work of edifying, building up, the Body of Christ. It is still today like it was in Nehemiah’s day. They were facing pressures and persecutions, antagonists and attacks, yet Nehemiah looked to the Lord, stood strong, and called the people to take their place in working on the wall, “each one to his own work,” Nehemiah 4:15. We must be faithful to do the same today.

II. The Evidence of a Selfish Life (Acts 5:1-11)

Acts 4 ends with a powerful illustration of a man named “Barnabas” who was a Levite. As a Levite, he was a man devoted to the Lord and held many responsibilities in the various sacrifices that were made at the temple. He was not supposed to own any property, but was supposed to live off of the offerings of the tribes of Israel. The fact that he did own a piece of land suggests that someone in his family had likely given this directly to him to be a sort of “security blanket” if the people of Israel failed to support him. Barnabas, like the majority in this early church, was moved by a heart for the Lord. He generously and sacrificially served the needs of the church by selling his property and giving all of the proceeds to meet the needs of those within the church. He gave generously, sacrificially, willingly, cheerfully, and freely, not expecting anything in return. He was simply obeying the Lord. What a beautiful picture of the mutual love and edification that was happening in the Church. One would hope that it would always stay that way. One would hope that nothing would ever change. Unfortunately, though, that was not the case. The church existed in a sinful world and it was full of imperfect people, just like it is today. While this beautiful unity and edification is the goal, it is not always the reality. In fact, the first word of Acts 5 – “but” – shows us that a major change was coming. It is here that we learn about a man named Ananias and his wife, Sapphira. Their actions show us what selfish living looks like.

A. It Longs for Attention (vs. 1)

Ananias and Sapphira saw the way that Barnabas was respected and admired by the church. To be clear, Barnabas didn’t do what he did to be seen by men. In fact, as we study Barnabas’ life in Scripture, it is quite clear that he preferred to be out of the limelight and went to great sacrificial lengths to encourage and help others. He was a man that was easy to admire and respect. As Ananias saw this, his heart was filled with jealousy. He longed to be seen in such a positive light. He wanted to be recognized and admired and looked up to. This all came from a heart of pride. God hates pride. In **Proverbs 8:13b** God said, “Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate.” In Proverbs 6 we are given a list of several things that God hates, the first of which is “the pride of life.” As Barnabas gives his generous gift, Satan began to fill Ananias’ heart and mind with lies. “Ananias, you can get that kind of attention. People will respect you and look up to you if you do this. Even the apostles will treat you better. Everyone will love you for your act of sacrifice.” Ananias should have resisted Satan’s temptations, but he was full of himself and what he wanted so, he planned to do a noble thing but for the wrong reasons. But, notice something important, God never told them to sell the land. God never told them to give the

money to the church. God never led them to do any of this. They simply came up with a plan for their own benefit, attention, and glory.

B. It Looks Out for Self (vs. 2)

So, they put the property up for sale and apparently it sold pretty quickly. If you've ever sold property you know that this is a blessing. And, it appears that they sold it for more than what they were expecting. But, remember, the basis for their actions was not that the Holy Spirit was leading them. The basis for their action is that they were doing this for themselves. Jesus had warned against this. In **Matthew 6:1-4** He said, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Ananias should have heeded this. Instead he and his wife were focused on self, so they determined how much they wanted to keep for themselves first. In other words, they weren't really doing this to honor God or to build up His church. They were doing what they felt was necessary to be admired and appreciated by the church and at the same time padding their pockets with the portion that they wanted first. Why? Because pride looks out for "number 1" first. It's about me, mine, what I want, what I need, etc. They selfishly put their wants before the will of God and the needs of the church, and sadly many professing believers still do the same today. Which brings us to a final point.

C. It Leads to Further Sin (vs. 3-11)

It all started so innocent, but it was now about to be devastating. **James 1:14-15** warns us, "Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." We see that in this passage, literally. Ananias and Sapphira devise a plan, "We will keep back the best portion of the money, then we will take the remainder to the church and tell Peter that God led us to do this, and God told us to give all the money, so here it is." So, as planned, Ananias goes to the church, makes a dramatic entrance (to be seen by men), announces his actions, and lays the money on the altar. He was expecting that Peter would commend him and that all the church would celebrate him, but the Holy Spirit-filled Peter knew immediately what was going on. He asked, "Why has Satan filled your heart to **lie** to the Holy Spirit?" He lusted for praise and attention, then looked out first for himself, and now Ananias is lying to God. Peter challenged Ananias, "You didn't have to do any of this. Why have you conceived this action in your heart? You have not lied to man, but to God." God is holy and wouldn't stand for it. Those would be the last words he heard. God judged him quickly, and instantly he dropped dead. The young men took him outside and buried him. Three hours later (which meant that they had much longer church services than we do ☹️), here comes Sapphira. She knows nothing of what had gone on, but she knows the plan. I imagine it was a dramatic entrance as she is awaiting the approval and applaud of

the crowd. She sadly and selfishly told the same lie with the same selfish agenda and she, too, died instantly. Instead of building up the Body, they had brought sin and division into the Body and God would not allow it. There is a powerful reminder here of how Satan often works to attack the Church. In Acts 4 Satan attacks from outside the church and brought trials and persecution, but that didn't work in destroying the church. And when it didn't, Satan changed his means of attack. This attack came from within and was focused on pride and lies and led to division and ultimately to death. **Warren Wiersbe** summed up this passage well. He said, "It is easy for us to condemn Ananias and Sapphira for their dishonesty, but we need to examine our own lives to see if our profession is backed up by our practice. Do we really mean everything that we pray about in public? Do we sing the hymns and Gospel songs sincerely or routinely? In Matthew 15:8 Jesus said, 'These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.' If God killed 'religious deceivers' today, how many church members would be left?" It is definitely a thought to consider. Am I committed to Christ and His Church? Am I surrendered and serving like Barnabas or am I more like Ananias and Sapphira simply looking out for myself and my own interests?

I don't share this passage of Scripture today to cause fear or to manipulate in any way at all. However, this passage does show us clearly how God works in and through those who are committed to Him and to edifying His Church. It also shows us how seriously God sees it when we look lightly upon His Church and bring division and destruction through selfishness and sin. Once the sinful actions were dealt with in the early church, they continued devoting themselves to Christ and to the edification of His Church. They continued serving one another and building one another up. They continued sharing the Gospel in their everyday lives. And what was the result? What happened when the world heard the truth and saw the truth of the Gospel in action? Verse 14 tells us, "And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number." It's 2019 and a lot has changed in the world since then, but God can still move in this way today. May we be committed to Edify the Church for the glory of the Lord, for the goal of equipping one another, and for the good of the lost world around us who desperately need Jesus!