

## **BROTHERHOOD IN THE ANOINTED ONE**

– ACTS 4:32; 5:11. – FEBRUARY 7. –

**Golden Text:** – "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but they that deal truly are his delight." – Prov. 12:22.

THIS lesson brings before our minds in sharp contrast a true and a false brotherhood in the Church. A shining example of the true was Barnabas, while Ananias and Sapphira were conspicuous illustrations of the false. The five hundred brethren who had become believers during our Lord's ministry, and who were thus prepared in advance for the Pentecostal blessing, were added to abundantly by the thousands converted on the day of Pentecost. As a whole, they were a very choice class. Only the children of the light, "Israelites indeed," stood loyally with the Redeemer during his trials and revilings. And a similar class of "Israelites indeed" proved amenable to the lessons and demonstrations and preaching of Pentecost Day. These were devout men, out of all the country around Judea, who were visiting Jerusalem at the time, attending a religious festival, in compliance with the demands of the Law.

### **"SATAN CAME ALSO"**

With such a flood of popularity as came to the Church at Pentecost, it was only to be expected that some would be carried in by the excitement and the miracles and the favor of the Lord who were not "Israelites indeed." But the latter evidently were few comparatively. Amongst the true, there was the fervor, the love, the fellowship of kindred minds. They realized themselves children of God, and brethren of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of each other. The experience was a new one, and the holy Spirit ruling in their hearts their sympathies flowed together in one common stream. Were some of them poor or crippled, lowly or

sad, the others took delight in ministering to their comfort. They were brethren in the fullest, deepest sense. How blessed this relationship none can really know, except those who have experienced it.

How few have experienced this mutual love in this our day! The mixture of the spirit of worldliness has so diluted the spirit of the Master in the hearts of the majority that true, brotherly love is but little understood. Nowhere probably in the world is the spirit of the brotherhood of the early Church more manifest today than amongst the gathering of the WATCH TOWER readers, in general conventions, or in lesser gatherings. It is beautiful indeed, heart-refreshing, to note the loving interest manifested one toward another. It evidences our return to the simplicity which is in Christ, and to the fellowship of his Spirit. Let us be glad for this. Let us cultivate this proper spirit, that the love of God and the love of the brethren may be more and more shed abroad in our hearts.

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## **COMMUNISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH**

Selfishness is buried under love; or rather, temporarily, it is filled, for selfishness is the spirit of the world and of the Adversary, while love is the Spirit of God, the holy Spirit. We are not supposing that in their fervency and in their comparative ignorance of their own weaknesses and of the weaknesses of each other, the early followers of the Lord started the Communistic arrangement. Putting all their property and wealth together, they shared it as each had need. The lesson ultimately was a good one: **(1)** It showed both them and us what should, by right, be the spirit of all who love the Lord and are begotten by his holy Spirit to the New Nature, as members of the Body of Christ, his brethren, God's people. All of the poor in heart should still feel

longings for such a condition of mutual helpfulness. However, this lesson learned, another was needed, namely, that the Lord's people, with the best of intentions in their hearts, are so differently organized physically – fallen in such different directions – that it is not practical, not feasible, for them to attempt to live together along Communistic lines. While giving each other credit for purity of heart and honesty of motives, the Lord's people learn that in their flesh dwelleth no perfection, and, likewise, none in the flesh of their brethren. Hence, with the same love in our hearts, the one for the other, we have learned that it is better to allow each other full freedom and full responsibility as respects the management of earthly affairs, and that this is the condition in which each can be happiest, and in which each can make greatest progress and learn best the needed lessons of preparation for the Millennial Kingdom and its services.

The early Church learned this lesson speedily. Its Communism did not last long. First of all the apostles found that, notwithstanding the confidence of **[R4318 : page 26]** the Church in them as spiritual and able ministers of the Gospel, and specially sent of the Lord, there were murmurings against them, because some thought that their interests were not so well served from the general fund as those of others. This led to the giving over of the management to the deacons, and ultimately the entire project fell to pieces. It taught a lesson profitable to the Lord's Church from that same to the present time. That lesson is that it is possible to have Communism in heaven, or on earth amongst perfect men, but not feasible to have it amongst those who are imperfect, and whose tastes and appetites, experiences, etc., are diverse. This is our answer to the dear friends who occasionally urge the expediency of Socialistic and Communistic arrangements at the present time.

We assure them, first, that the project is not feasible, because, however sympathetic and loyal our hearts are one to the

other, our mortal bodies and their tastes cannot be kept in full harmony. And discord becomes the more serious, the more close the contact and unlimited the time. Furthermore, as the Lord raised up the great persecution which scattered the Church and its Communism and sent them everywhere as solitary witnesses for the Truth, so, we believe, it will be here. The Lord wills that his people shall be scattered throughout the world, in order that they may the better let their lights shine in the midst of the earthly darkness, bearing witness to the Truth.

### **BARNABAS – SON OF CONSOLATION**

The description given us in the lesson beautifully illustrates the spirit of full consecration to the Lord – a full love and generosity towards all the brethren and a full confidence in the apostles as the Lord's representatives. Their wealth was brought and laid at the apostles' feet. Amongst others who did thus was Joseph, the uncle of John Mark, supposedly a member of a wealthy family, residing in the Mount of Olives, in the house the garden of which was our Lord's Gethsemane. He now had become an earnest follower of the Nazarene. He sold a field which he possessed and brought the proceeds to the apostles' feet. He was evidently a man of great sympathy and beautiful character, as is evidenced by the surname given him in the early Church, namely Barnabas. The word signifies, "Son of a consoling message," or, more briefly, "Son of consolation." Thank God the same spirit is yet to be found amongst his people. Some of them are sons and some of them are daughters of consolation, especially to his other sons and daughters – sympathetic, loving, kind, helpful.

Barnabas was a Levite, and hence was trained with a view to the work of a teacher, instructor amongst his people. Tradition has it that he became acquainted with Saul of Tarsus in the Gamaliel school. However, the bonds of union between the two,

which subsequently took them forth as messengers of the good tidings, was not the earthly tie, but the spiritual one. So with us. The more we possess of the spirit of holiness, devotion to God, to righteousness, the spirit of love and devotion to the brethren, the more may we be sons of consolation, pouring forth upon all with whom we have contact the unction from the "Holy One," the anointing, the perfume of love.

Barnabas is set before us in the lesson as a sample of the spirit of proper fellowship and brotherhood in the early Church, and the consolation resulting. Let it be so with us. Let us each strive to be worthy of this name – Barnabas – in our home relationship, and especially in the Church of Christ. Let us see to it that we are not strife-breeders, but peacemakers. Let us remember the words of inspiration, "Mark them that cause divisions amongst you, and avoid them" – reprove them by avoiding them. Show them that you do not sympathize with such a strifeful, unholy spirit. We are not to smite them, nor to speak evil of them, nor to revile them in turn again, but simply to give our attention and smiles and cheering words to others, to such as manifest more of the Lord's Spirit. To those who can be helped at all, such a course will be very helpful, far more so than fellowshiping with them, which might, indeed, encourage them to feel that they had the approval of the pure in heart and noble in mind. We are to distinguish between such an avoidance and such a fellowship and the appointment to honorable positions in the Church as one thing, and the still different matter of disfellowshipping and cutting off from the Body of Christ, the Church. The latter can be properly done only according to the rules prescribed by our Master in Matt. 18:15-17.

### **"SATAN FILLED THY HEART"**

Now we come to the other side of the lesson. In Ananias and Sapphira, his wife, we have an illustration of a deceitful,

hypocritical spirit, displeasing to God, and to all the right-minded of his children. These desired and appreciated the general spirit of the Church, and wished to share in it, but wished to keep back a part of the price. As St. Peter pointed out they had a perfect right to do this, and might have kept it all, but they had no right to lie about it, to pretend that they were making a full consecration of everything, when the case was otherwise. Therein consisted their fault. They might indeed have deceived their fellow-creatures of the Church, but they could not deceive the Lord. St. Peter, under the power of the holy Spirit, and possessing the gift of discerning the spirits, was made acquainted with the situation, and, acting under Divine guidance, he reproved them in the name of the Lord, and the result was their death, as recorded.

Although we are not of those who believe that they went to eternal torment, it might seem to us strange that the Lord's providence would not grant them instruction on the subject, rather than permit their destruction. We may safely assume that the imposing of a summary death sentence upon them was with a view of giving a general lesson to the Church, not only of that day, but ever since. It would not at all surprise **[R4318 : page 27]** us if Ananias and Sapphira would have some portion of God's Great Plan in the future, when they may learn the error of their course and mend their way and learn righteousness. It would appear as though they had share with the Church in the various blessings thus far enjoyed. We doubt, however, if they were spirit-begotten ones, and hence amenable to the Second Death. However, we may be sure that when all the secrets are unfolded, the wisdom, love, justice and power of our God, in connection with this and every other obscure dealing of his, will be made fully manifest.

The lesson brought great fear to the whole Church; not the fear which has torment, not the fear which comes from lack of faith, but the proper kind of fear, the fear of reverence, the fear of

trifling, of offending our gracious Father and Lord, from whom we have already received so many blessings and from whom we are expecting to receive the crowning blessings of glory, honor and immortality. This was the fear to which the Apostle referred, admonishing that we should all have, saying, "Let us fear, lest a promise being made us of entering into his rest, any should seem to come short of it."

Our Golden Text points us to God's abomination of lying lips and his delight in the Truth. The principle of Truth is honesty, and it effects not only our words, but all of the conduct of life; yea, and also our thoughts. Hypocrisy is deceit of action. To deceive another is lying in one of its most unworthy forms. And, as the mainspring of life is in the heart, and "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," and the conduct of life is arranged, we may see that a deceitful heart and a deceitful mind are most dangerous things in the world. How jealously, therefore, God's people should guard their thoughts – in respect to God, in respect to the world, in respect to every word and act, to the intent that no injustice is permitted, no falsehood is recognized. Such are the pure in heart. Such are the saints. Such will see God and be joint-heirs with their Lord. How diligently, then, we should watch our hearts, our thoughts, that they be honest, true, truthful, in every sense and particular!

