

## CHRISTIAN COMMUNISM

– ACTS 4:32 – 5:16 – FEBRUARY 20. –

CHRIST'S SPIRIT IS SYMPATHETIC, LOVING – THIS WAS ILLUSTRATED IN THE EARLY CHURCH AND SINCE – LOVE IS BENEVOLENT – "SEEKETH NOT HER OWN" INTERESTS ONLY – COMMUNISM TRIED – WHY IT FAILED – WHY IT WAS PERMITTED – ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA – HOW SEVERE WAS THEIR PUNISHMENT?

**"Love one another from the heart fervently." – 1 Peter 1:22.**

GOD is Love; and all, in proportion as they have fellowship with God, must have His character-likeness and be loving, generous, kind. Selfishness is of Satan, the Adversary. He is the embodiment of that spirit, since he allowed pride and ambition to mislead him. The world, under the influence of the prince of this world, Satan, and the influence of the fall, is a selfish world, and to that extent ungodly.

The work of the Millennial Age will be to give all mankind a full opportunity of recovery from the snare of the Devil – to Restitution, to recovery of all that was lost in Adam, and redeemed for Adam and his race by Jesus. That will be a glorious Millennium, helpful and uplifting to all the willing and obedient. The Church at that time will be with Jesus on the spirit plane, invisible to men and armed with all the power of God. Her work, like her Lord's is described. She will share with her Lord in His Kingdom rule, His Priesthood and His Judgeship – giving chastisements or rewards to mankind, and these shall be designed with a view to educating them, to uplifting them to the condition of perfection.

This Gospel Age is the period in which God has been selecting this Church from amongst mankind. All of the select ones will be saints, regardless of denominational lines. God has destined that none shall be of that company except those who are copies of His

Son. (Romans 8:29.) The Church has received special testing and education for the glorious mission marked out for her – the blessing of judging the world. The Church must not only have a sympathy for others, but must cultivate this quality to the attainment of Christ's likeness in heart, and as much as possible must have that likeness in outward living and in thinking.

The record tells us that the number of believers was many thousand in a little while. The spirit of love began to burn in their hearts – thankfulness to God, appreciation of His favor, a desire to serve Him, and a sympathy and love for the brotherhood.

We perceive that some were poor; and, controlled by the spirit of love, the well-to-do felt that they would like all the poorer brethren to have just as good as themselves. First they gave privately one to another, as they [R5850 : page 44] realized the needs. Then the matter went further and they organized a little community. Many of the wealthier sold their possessions and turned in the money to the Lord's treasury, desiring that a certain amount be supplied to themselves and all the other members of the community – share and share alike.

This manifested a very beautiful spirit, and under perfect conditions would have been the wise as well as the proper course. As it was, the community proved a failure. Nevertheless, the Lord apparently permitted that [R5850 : page 45] test and failure for a good purpose – to show us that no such community amongst His people is possible at the present time. The community principle will prosper wonderfully as soon as Messiah's Kingdom is established; but it is impracticable at the present time, as it was in the days of the Apostles.

## **BARNABAS NOT AN APOSTLE**

This lesson introduces us to Barnabas, a godly man and wise, a mighty power in the Church. His name signifies consolation, and

evidently it was an appropriate name. His proper name was Joses; and he must have been a very fine character when the Apostles gave him the new name Barnabas – implying that he had a beautiful spirit and was in his daily life a "son of consolation" to the brethren and all with whom he had contact.

Barnabas had a property or estate, and sold it, and brought the proceeds to the Apostles' feet. He was not an Apostle, for of them there were only Twelve, and at this time only eleven, because of the loss of Judas. St. Paul, the twelfth Apostle, the Lord's chosen vessel, and "not one whit behind the very chiefest of the Apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5), had not yet had his eyes opened to the truth of the Gospel.

Barnabas was quite willing to take his share with the others from the general dole; however, amongst those who accepted the terms of the proposition were Ananias and his wife Sapphira. These had property and sold it and kept back a portion of the price, bringing the remainder to the Apostles as though it were the entire sum. Indeed in conspiring between themselves they had agreed to declare that the money they turned in to the treasury was all they received from the property. Our lesson tells of how St. Peter treated the matter. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he said, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" He pointed out to Ananias that the property was his own, that he was not compelled or urged to donate it to this community, that it was only his own voluntary gift, and that he had thus lied to God, and not merely to the community. Ananias, hearing these words, fell down dead – smitten of the Lord; and his wife suffered similarly a little later. A great fear fell on all the company when they heard of these things.

### **WHY REPENTANCE WAS NOT PREACHED**

St. Peter doubtless remembered his own sad experience when he once denied the Lord. We query, Why did he not sympathize with

Ananias and Sapphira, pointing out to them wherein they had erred, and urge them to repentance, and join with them in prayer rather than pronounce upon them the death penalty?

Our thought is that these two culprits were not really God's children – that they had never received the begetting of the Holy Spirit; and that the Lord took this opportunity to give a great lesson to the Church – to remind them that they were dealing, not with flesh and blood, but with Jehovah God. From this viewpoint, it was worth while to sacrifice these two persons under Divine judgment with a view to teaching the Church, then and in future generations, how displeasing in the Lord's sight is hypocrisy – especially in respect to religious things.

If these two had been spirit-begotten, then their punishment would be the Second Death; and we would have no Scriptural ground for expecting them to have any resurrection or future consideration from the Lord. But if they were merely children of this world, not fully appreciative of spiritual things, their future interests are not destroyed. They still belong to the great world of mankind for whom Christ died, and have not yet received in full the blessings of reconciliation with God through the Lord Jesus. Such glorious favor may be expected for the world in general, in the sweet by and by – during the Millennium, when "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" and be brought to a knowledge of the Truth and to an opportunity of accepting the same unto salvation.

If our surmise be correct, Ananias and Sapphira were in a very different position from Judas, who had companied with our Lord for years, who had witnessed His miracles, had received of His Holy Spirit and through that power had cast out demons, healed the sick, etc. Our charitable thought for Ananias and Sapphira is, that if they had not received the Holy Spirit they but imperfectly appreciated what they were doing. Although they did know that they were practising a deception, they apparently did not get a proper focus

upon the matter. Our expectation for them is that they have not sinned unto death; and that the life which they lost they will have back again in the resurrection time, with full opportunity to get matters straight and to determine finally their loyalty or disloyalty to God under the illumination which they will then have.

The designed effect was realized. Great fear and respect for God and everything appertaining to Him in religion fell upon the whole multitude. It was worth while to punish the one couple severely, in view of the preparation made for their blessing in future and in view of the lesson which their experience brought to the remainder of the Church.

### **THE SAME SPIRIT OF DECEPTION NOW**

We are not gifted, as was St. Peter, with authority to represent the Lord's interests in judging others. It would appear, however, from all that we are able to know, that there are many today living equally deceptive lives. We are not permitted to judge them, but they judge themselves by what they tell us. They profess to be consecrated to the Lord – Jehovah – sacrificed to the Divine cause. Nevertheless they keep back much through self-will, professing to be fully devoted followers of Jesus.

Some of these, doubtless, belong to the same class as Ananias. They have become associated with Christians, but have never been begotten of the Holy Spirit and have really neither part nor lot with Christ. Others may be real Christians, and be keeping back part of their consecration. If so, the latter may be sure that they will be dealt with. So the Apostle declares, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not [need to] be judged [of the Lord]. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." (1 Corinthians 11:31,32.) Such Christians, building upon the Rock Christ Jesus, will apparently need to come through the fiery ordeal pointed out in the Bible, and "wash their robes and make them

white in the blood of the Lamb," in great tribulation – for failing to live up to their covenant of complete sacrifice. – Revelation 7:9-17.

It would indeed appear as though hypocrisy, which the Bible intimates is especially wicked in the sight of God, is practised to a great length amongst the nominal followers of Jesus. Professions of creeds not believed and a form of godliness without its power seem on every hand to tell us that many must be living hypocritically and subject, therefore, to the Divine judgment. The lesson to us is, "Take heed that no man take thy crown."

Our Golden Text here comes in appropriately. We are to love one another – first our Heavenly Father, then our Heavenly Lord Jesus; and finally, we should love, and as we have opportunity serve, the brethren. Actively engaged in this manner, we shall be kept from hypocrisy and be ready for our share in the Heavenly Kingdom.

