

Authenticity Matters: Living Truthfully Before God

Acts 5:1-11

NO PERFECT CHURCH: “There is no perfect church, not even the church of the apostles. I read Acts 4:32, ‘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,’ and I think, ah, there’s the perfect church. But even this church had Ananias and Sapphira in it. Someone once told Charles Spurgeon that they were leaving his church because they were going to find a perfect church. Spurgeon, who had a great deal of wit and sometimes was more forthright than people dare to be today, said, ‘When you find it, please don’t join it, because you’ll ruin it.’”¹

I. The Pretense (Acts 5:1-2)

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles’ feet.” – Acts 5:1-2

- “Ananias” means “God is gracious” and Sapphira means “beautiful” - These two conspired to deceive the apostles and the church by pretending to give the full proceeds from the sale of their property. Their sin was not in withholding part of the money but in lying about their generosity. They sought to gain the reputation of sacrificial givers without making the actual sacrifice.
- George MacDonald wrote, “Half of the misery in the world comes from trying to look, instead of trying to be, what one is not.”
- Hypocrisy means “wearing a mask, playing the actor” We must not think that failure to reach our ideals is hypocrisy because no believer lives up to all that he or she knows or has in the Lord. Hypocrisy is deliberate deception, trying to make people think we are more spiritual than we really are.

Application: Examine your motives for serving God. Are you seeking recognition, or are you acting from a sincere heart?

II. The Perception (Acts 5:3-4)

“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.’” – Acts 5:3-4

- Peter, through the discernment of the Holy Spirit, exposed their sin. Though their deception may have fooled others, it could not fool God. This reminds us that God perceives not only our actions but also the intentions of our hearts.

Application: God sees not only what we do but why we do it. Ask Him to purify your motives (Psalm 139:23-24).

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 97.

III. The Punishment (**Acts 5:5-6**)

"Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him." – Acts 5:5-6

- God's swift judgment on Ananias and later on Sapphira (**v.7-10**) demonstrates the seriousness of sin, especially hypocrisy within His church. While this level of immediate judgment is rare, it serves as a warning that God does not take sin lightly.
- One writer states, **"A dangerous holiness is God's response to a determined hypocrisy"**. Jesus called out Pharisees for their hypocrisy. They wanted to be known and praised for their righteous acts. Tony Merida writes² how Ananias and Sapphira exemplified that same spirit:
 1. **They were spiritual posers** (**vv. 1-2**). Theirs was a sham holiness, a fake piety.
 2. **They were praise seekers** (**vv. 1-2**). These two wanted a reputation like Barnabas without having the compassion of Barnabas.
 3. **They were liars** (**vv. 3-4**). The couple lied about their charity! And they did it together! God calls His people to be a people of integrity. He despises lying (**Prov 6:16-18**). When people don't value the holiness of God, they minimize sin. And when they do that, they devalue the cross, where Jesus traded places with liars.
 4. **They were greedy** (**v. 3**). Peter says that Ananias and Sapphira "kept back" part of the proceeds. The verb used here means "to pilfer" or "to embezzle." The same rare verb occurs in the Greek version of **Joshua 7:1-26**, in the story of Achan, which Luke would have known.
 5. **They were deceivers** (**v. 4**). God knows what is done and said in secret; we can't hide anything from him.
 6. **They were Satan's instruments** (**v. 3**). Whatever we make of Peter's question about Satan filling Ananias's heart, we must affirm the real influence of Satan. Jesus once warned Peter about Satan (**Luke 22:31**).
 7. **They were Spirit grievors** (**vv. 3-4**). The Holy Spirit is not a force but a person who can be grieved.

Application: How seriously do you take sin in your life? Do you confess and turn from it? Do you minimize and justify it?

IV. The Purpose (**Acts 5:11**)

"So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things." – Acts 5:11

- The purpose of this judgment was to preserve the purity and integrity of the early church. It served as an example to the believers and to the watching world that God's church must be marked by holiness, truth, and sincerity.
- **Were Ananias and Sapphira Christians?** John MacArthur writes, "Some have questioned whether or not they were true believers. It is best to see them as genuine Christians for several reasons. First, they were included in the 'congregation of those who believed' in Acts 4:32. Second, they were involved with the Holy Spirit, thus indicating a relationship to Him. Third, if they were not Christians, what lesson about sin did this give to teach all the rest who were true believers? Fourth, Satan can become personally involved with believers (cf. Matt. 16:21-23; Eph. 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8-9). Finally, death can be divine chastening for a believer (1 Cor. 11:30-32; 1 John 5:16).³ See also 1 Corinthians 5:5 and Hebrews 12:5.

Additional Observations:

1. **God Sees Through Pretense:** Hypocrisy may fool people, but it will never fool God. (**Acts 5:4**)
2. **Satan Exploits Weaknesses:** Even believers can give Satan a foothold through sin and selfishness. (**Acts 5:3**)
3. **Sin Has Serious Consequences:** God's judgment here reminds us of the gravity of sin. (**Acts 5:5-6, Heb. 12:5-6**)
4. **God Desires a Pure Church:** Authenticity and integrity are essential for a thriving church. (**Acts 5:11**)

² Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 73-74.

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 153.