

# Ananias And Sapphira

Acts 5:1-11 NIV

Every time God works to accomplish something that involves people, we can be sure of one thing: people will find a way to mess it up.

We know this to be true from our own experiences; we can read about it in history books and in the scriptures.

The early church was off to a great start, with great power and explosive growth and a godly reputation. What could possibly derail it?

Johnny's first day of school the class was to put their right hands over their hearts and repeat the Pledge of Allegiance. The teacher watched the children as they started, "I pledge allegiance to the flag..." She stopped when she noticed Johnny's right hand over the left side of his rear end. "Johnny, I will not continue until you put your hand over your heart." Johnny replied, "Ma'am, It is over my heart." After several attempts to get Johnny to put his hand over his heart, the teacher asked, "Why do you think that is your heart?" "Because whenever my Granny visits, she picks me up, pats me here, and says, 'Bless your little heart,' and my Granny doesn't lie!"

I won't ask you to put your hand over your heart and swear to anything, but, today, we are going to be talking about heart and lying. Our text begins in Acts, chapter 5. However, we haven't left Acts, chapter 4 just yet.

Remember in Acts 2:42-47, and Acts 4:32-35, Luke gave summaries of what was happening among the believers. Following these summaries are examples: the healing of the cripple beggar follows the chapter 2 summary; the sacrificial giving of the Son of Encouragement follows chapter 4. But, Luke isn't finished with examples yet.

Don't let chapter divisions throw you a curve. Chapter divisions came much later. The story of Ananias and Sapphira is a part of Acts 4:32-35 summary. Barnabas illustrates one way to be part of the believers who were one in heart and mind. Ananias and Sapphira illustrate one way not to be a part of the believers who were of one heart and mind.

**Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. <sup>2</sup> With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 5:1-2)**

In a survey it was found that 15 percent of the ladies tinted their hair, 38 percent wore rouge, 98 percent wore eye shadow, 22 percent wore false eyelashes, 93 percent wore nail polish. And 100 percent voted in favor of a resolution condemning any kind of false packaging.

Sapphira was not part of that survey. She did not condemn the false package Ananias was going to present to the apostles.

Ananias and Sapphira were performing an act of dedication while entangled in conspiracy and deception. Sounds like a plot for a movie or miniseries doesn't it?

Up to this point, Luke has reported that the believers found favor with the people. The Sanhedrin leveled threats against spreading the resurrection of Jesus; the only opposition until now has come from the outside.

But now, through this husband and wife team, an attempt by the powers of darkness to infiltrate the ranks of the believers; through deception- using one of the distinctive marks of the church: sacrificial giving.

The hypocrisy that was so prevalent with the Pharisees and Sadducees is making an attempt to penetrate the one heart and mind of the believers: corruption on the inside; divide and conquer; Satan used persecution from the outside and now attempts corruption from within.

The believers claimed that their possessions were not their own, **but they shared everything they had. (Acts 4:32)**

But Ananias wanted part of his money and full credit for giving all.

**Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received**

for the land? <sup>4</sup> Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." (Acts 5:3-4)

I found this story that a preacher told about himself: Recently, I sold one of my shirts on Ebay. And I was so happy because I could only sell it at the local thrift shop for \$1.50. And yet I found someone on Ebay who bought it for \$7.99!

But then as I was folding the shirt to send out, I found some stains along one of the cuffs. And I tried washing it. I tried spraying it with Shout. But the stain wouldn't come out.

At first, I was thinking, "Well, she paid for it already: you win some; you lose some."

But God was telling me, "Marc, that's not the way the people of faith do business. That woman bought the shirt for her husband. She didn't know it was stained. You have to tell her."

So I emailed her and said, "I'm really sorry. I found a stain on the shirt that I didn't notice before. And I can't in good conscience sell you a shirt that I know to be defective. I can send your money back if you'd like."

She accepted the refund. And later on, she left this feedback on my seller page: "This is an honest Ebayer. The way all of Ebay should be."

He said, "That feedback meant more to me than the lousy \$7.99. I may have lost the sale. But I saved my reputation as an honest disciple of Jesus Christ."

Ah, that's no big deal. How many times have you heard that lie in your mind?

How honest is honest? Can you have degrees of honesty? Can you be slightly crooked and still be straight? How about white lies? If we can tell white lies and still be okay, then we should be able to be a white witch or warlock and be a Christian too, shouldn't we? Sounds reasonable to me. Or do we need to draw the line somewhere else?

What's the big deal? The church got the money; right? Taking a life over a few dollars? What happened to making the punishment fit the crime?

In Genesis 19, when God overthrew the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, He told Lot and his family to flee for their lives and not to look back, didn't he? What's the big deal in looking back? God said not to.

In Lev. 10, the sons of Aaron offered unauthorized, or false fire, to the Lord and they were killed for it. That's pretty extreme, isn't it?

God paid a hefty price so that the Holy Spirit could live in man. That's pretty extreme and that's the big deal.

When Ananias **kept back part of the money for himself**, this is the same thing

that Achan did in Joshua 7. He stole something that was "devoted" to God.

Do you remember the story? In the first verse of Joshua 7, Achan took some of the devoted things for himself. **The Lord's anger burned against Israel. (7:1)** They couldn't defeat their enemies until the situation was corrected. What one man did made all of Israel liable. Achan took something that had been devoted, or set aside to God for sacred use.

Ananias and Sapphira did not sin because they didn't give all the money from the sale of the land. It was because they pretended to do so. What they had devoted to God for sacred use was a lie.

The word translated 'kept back' could also be translated 'embezzle:' to secretly take a part of a larger quantity which had been given as a trust.

They were not required to sell anything or give money to the church to become part of the group. They could have sold the property and kept any part of the money they wanted. But when they said that they gave it all, even what they kept for themselves became part of the trust: set aside to God for sacred use.

In Matthew 13, Jesus tells the parable of the sower:

**"A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly,**

because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. <sup>9</sup> He who has ears, let him hear.” (Matthew 13:3-9)

Examine the membership rolls of just about any church in America and you will find more inactive members than active. Why? Persecution; that’s doubtful, in America, anyway. Tribulation; possibly. For the early church, many lost their jobs when they became a Christian. Some were disowned by their families, or hunted down by the government. This still happens in more subtle ways.

How about the thorns in Jesus parable: any of you plagued by thorns? Thorns even come with something as beautiful as a rose.

There are all kinds of thorns. For example: the pursuit of pleasure can override the pursuit of the kingdom of God. Or, it can be success, recognition, recreation, power, money...all kinds of thorns in many different forms.

Some seed falls on good soil, like Barnabas. Some seed gets choked out. As we continue through Acts, Satan and his cronies will provide more examples of thorns.

Paul, when instructing Titus what various groups need to be taught, wrote this about slaves: **Teach slaves to be subject to**

their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, <sup>10</sup> and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive. (Titus 2:10)

8 till 4; 9-5; 12 hour swing shifts; midnight turn: Fully trusted in every way...does this mean that as a Christian, my work ethic is a sacred trust before God?

**Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. <sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)**

That takes care of the ‘everything’ in the Titus passage, doesn’t it?

They lied to the Holy Spirit. In verses 5-10, Ananias, then Sapphira, after being questioned by Peter and their plot revealed, fell dead and were buried.

Verse 11: **Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.**

What should be our personal response in light of what we have heard today?

Here is one thing: don’t take what we do around this communion table every week lightly. Respect for the church and the Holy Spirit; honest searching considering the price that was paid for this privilege.

The way we do things, the reason we do things, the motivation for our actions; these

are all important things to God. God does not agree that the end justify the means.

Two Kentucky farmers who owned racing stables had developed a keen rivalry. One spring, each of them entered a horse in local steeplechase. Thinking that a professional rider might help him outdo his friend, one of the farmers hired a seasoned jockey.

The two horses were leading the race at the last fence, but it proved too tough for them. Both horses fell, unseating their riders. But, this calamity did not stop the professional jockey. He quickly remounted and won the race.

Returning triumphant, the jockey found the farmer who had hired him fuming with rage. "What’s the matter," asked the jockey. "I won didn’t I?"

"Oh, yes," roared the farmer. "You won all right, but you still don’t know, do you?" "Know what?" asked the jockey. "You won the race on the wrong horse!"

Satan’s tools never change. He uses deception, division, distrust, in an attempt to defeat individual Christians and the Church of Jesus Christ as a whole.

You can fool people, but you can’t fool God. You can’t wear a mask to hide your sin from God.

Flip Wilson’s excuse that the ‘devil made him do it’ won’t fly. Even though Satan may fill your heart to lie, it is

ultimately you who are responsible for your actions.

When it comes to the integrity and purity of the church, God doesn't play games. God does things according to His character and the principles He has revealed.

If we want to do God's work, we need to do it God's way. And that is the way of integrity, sacrifice, unselfishness, faith.

We began this message with this statement: Every time God works to accomplish something that involves people, we can be sure of one thing: people will find a way to mess it up.

Where there is unity of trust, oneness of heart and mind, the church flourishes in the power of the Spirit, Where there is deception and distrust, her witness fails. The same Spirit that gave the church its growth sent a message to the community of believers as well as all who heard about these events. The Holy Spirit intends to maintain the Bride's purity.

The apostle Paul uses the illustration of a race to describe the Christian's journey. The Holy Spirit living in each Christian desires that the race be finished with integrity and purity.

Satan is okay with the believer finishing the race as long as they finish on the wrong horse.