

5. Ananias and Sapphira

Acts 4:32-5:11

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions were their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Even a man called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 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.

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? 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 just to human beings but to God."

When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

INTRODUCTION: (Ask a pre-story question to discuss in pairs or as a group.)

- What do you think is most important in the church, unity or truth?

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

- **How does the story describe how believers lived together? How were they made able to live this way? How does grace produce unity?**
- **We observe that the apostles continued to testify with great power about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How does the apostles' teaching relate to the unity of the believers? What does this show us?**
 - **It was the power of God's grace at work in them as it had taken root in their lives. The Gospel produces unity.**
- **How did Barnabas practically demonstrate his trust in Jesus? Why would it take faith on his part to do what he did?**
- **Was Barnabas required to sell his land and donate all the money? What does his gift teach us about giving? What does this show us about the trustworthiness of the apostles?**
- **What happened with Ananias and Saphira? What was wrong with what they did? Were they required to give away all the money? Why do you think they did what they did?**
- **How does Peter respond to what Ananias did? How did he know? Why did Peter rebuke him? How could this happen in the early church where it seemed that people were responding so positively to the Gospel and loving each other so well?**
- **How was Ananias punished for his sin? Why was it such a severe punishment? What was God teaching the church of that time and us as well?**
- **Why did Peter ask Sapphira about the money when he already knew the answer?**
- **Great fear came upon all those who saw and heard about these things in the whole church. What does that teach us? When can fear be good?**

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

1. **Unity: We should be one in heart and mind.**
2. **Grace at Work:**
3. **Generosity: We are to share with those in need.**
4. **Trustworthiness:**

5. **Truthfulness: We must not lie to God or other people.**
6. **Holiness:**
7. **Identity:** Trust Jesus for your identity instead of lying to impress people.
8. **Preach the Gospel:**
9. **Trust the Gospel:**

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some ways that we Christians sometimes try to make others think that we are more spiritual than we actually are? What types of things do we say or do?**
 - Ex. Trying to make people think you are a person of prayer or a truly generous person when in reality you are not.
 - Ex. Exaggerating how great and effective your ministry is and how many people are coming to faith. Might even use words of thanksgiving to God when deep down we just want people to be impressed with us.
 - Ex. Teaching others not to entertain corruption but giving in ourselves to bribe the police and make excuses by blaming it on the system.
- **How are we hypocritical and self-serving in the church today?**
- **When is it most difficult to trust the leaders of the church today? How can we promote an attitude of trust and trustworthiness in the church? What should be the attitude of the members of the church? What should be the responsibility of the leaders of the church?**

Personal Application:

- **Is there an area of your life in which you are not taking sin seriously?**
- **What are some words or actions that you use to try to make others think you are more spiritual than you actually are?**
 - **Another way to think about this question- where do you see hypocrisy in your life?**
- **What is a practical way that you can promote a sense of trust and trustworthiness in your own church?**

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **How does the story describe how believers lived together? How were they made able to live this way? How does grace produce unity?**
 - The believers had one heart and mind and shared everything with one another. Some were even selling properties to help others.
 - The apostles continued to preach and testify to Christ's resurrection.

- **We observe that the apostles continued to testify with great power about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How does the apostles' teaching relate to the unity of the believers? What does this show us?**
 - The resurrection was central to the church's Gospel teaching.
 - It is through the empowering of the Holy Spirit that we are able to testify to the resurrection of Jesus.
 - We live out the truths that we believe. The truth of the Gospel is the foundation for treating others with love.
 - It was the **power of God's grace at work in them** as it had taken root in their lives. Trusting the Gospel of grace produces humility, removes pride in position or ownership, removes jealousy, makes us willing to give because we know we have received God's amazing grace. They knew that they had been saved by grace alone through faith alone and responded by loving fellow brothers and showing grace to each other.
 - The Gospel produces unity. As we trust Jesus for our salvation we become more able to trust him for other things, including providing for us if we sacrifice our own possessions. The Gospel also helps people - both leaders and needy church members - to be trustworthy to receive and use gifts rightly.

- **How did Barnabas practically demonstrate his trust in Jesus? Why would it take faith on his part to do what he did?**
 - Barnabas sold a field and laid the money to the apostles' feet to share with those in need.
 - Barnabas trusted that God would provide for his own needs as he put his trust in Jesus and lived for God's kingdom. (Read Matthew 6:33)

- **Was Barnabas required to sell his land and donate all the money? What does his gift teach us about giving? What does this show us about the trustworthiness of the apostles?**
 - His giving was not required. He chose to do so out of the generosity of his heart. Giving must come from a trusting, generous heart.
 - He then trusted the apostles to distribute the money he gave. Leaders of churches must show themselves trustworthy and concerned about the good of others and about God's kingdom purposes.

- **What happened with Ananias and Saphira? What was wrong with what they did? Were they required to give away all the money? Why do you think they did what they did?**
 - They also, like Barnabas, chose to sell a piece of land. But they planned together to keep some of the money for themselves before presenting the rest to the apostles.
 - This gift was not required of them! They never had to sell the piece of land in the first place but chose to.
 - They were claiming to have brought all the proceeds and not admitting that they kept some for their needs. They lied to the apostles and to God.
 - Maybe they saw how everyone loved what Barnabas had just done and wanted the praise of the Apostles and the other believers. Their faith was just an act - to look spiritual, committed, and generous.

- **How does Peter respond to what Ananias did? How did he know? Why did Peter rebuke him? How could this happen in the early church where it seemed that people were responding so positively to the Gospel and loving each other so well?**
 - He tells Ananias that Satan has filled his heart and that he has lied to the Holy Spirit by pretending he was giving all the money. His lie was not just lying to man but to God.
 - Our sin is first and foremost against God.
 - Satan is a deceiver and is always trying to penetrate the church and cause division in the church. We see that he does not like it when a church is living in unity of one heart and mind.
 - Satan filling our heart and making us lie to the Spirit, to others, and to ourselves is the opposite of seeing God's grace powerfully at work in someone.
 - Ananias' lie was in pretending he was more generous than he was in order to impress others. If he truly believed in the Gospel he would know that his identity is secure in Jesus.

- **How was Ananias punished for his sin? Why was it such a severe punishment? What was God teaching the church of that time and us as well?**
 - God is serious about sin, particularly lying to God. A church that is not serious about sin is denying the holiness of God and the power of the Gospel. This is an important time when God is laying the foundation for Christ's church. This stark punishment makes it clear to people the sin we deserve and the wonder of God's grace to save us from it.
 - The wages of sin is death. This is what we all deserve if not for the mercy of God. Ananias' punishment was just.
 - Sin, no matter how big or little we think it is, separates us from a Holy God. God has the power to Judge and ultimately will Judge all people one day.
 - We are blessed to know that we have the gospel of grace for those who believe in Jesus Christ and what he has done. We must not take it for granted.

- **Why did Peter ask Sapphira about the money when he already knew the answer?**
 - He gave her a chance to confess her sin, repent, and receive forgiveness, but she tried to hide her sin and experienced the judgment of God. It was not Peter who laid down the judgment, but God.
- **Great fear came upon all those who saw and heard about these things in the whole church. What does that teach us? When can fear be good?**
 - Proverbs 1:7 says “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom.”
 - We should pray for God's help to live a life of repentance, dependent on the Holy Spirit.
 - We should stand in awe of the Lord who is all powerful while also realizing he is the same Lord who calls us friend.

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Unity: We should be one in heart and mind.**
- **Grace at Work:** Through faith, let grace work itself out in our hearts and bear fruit in our lives.
- **Generosity: We are to share with those in need. Is it wrong to possess personal property?**
 - Peter did not condemn Ananias for owning property or for owning the funds from the sale. He condemned him for lying to God.
 - Someone needs to examine their own heart to see if their attitude is one of sharing what God has given them joyfully and being ready to sacrifice themselves to help those in need.
- **Trustworthiness:** Be people in whom others can put their trust - whether a leader who needs to steward resources or a needy person who needs to be honest about his needs without exaggerating.
- **Truthfulness: We must not lie to God or other people,** especially if our goal is to exalt ourselves in the eyes of others. We must be honest about sin, especially the sin of our hearts. Lying is wrong, one of the Ten Commandments even, but loving our own reputation instead of honoring God is ultimately a sin against God. **What story in the OT does this remind you of?**
 - David and Bathsheba. “I have sinned against the Lord.”
- **Holiness:** God's demands holiness and punishes those who refuse to repent and trust the Savior. **Will people always fall down and die immediately when confronted with sin against God?**
 - Clearly not, but the punishment for unrepentant sin is still death. Sin is serious.
- **Identity:** Trust Jesus for your identity instead of lying to impress people.
- **Preach the Gospel:** We see that the early church continued fulfilling the earlier command to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and focused on the resurrection.
- **Trust the Gospel:** The reason that being reminded of the Gospel is so important for unity is that it reminds us of our true identity. As forgiven sinners covered in the righteousness of Christ, adopted as God's children, we are freed from having to pretend we are something we are not. It frees us of any motivation to lie, steal,

and deceive. And when we fail and sin, it reminds us to repent and run back to our Father in heaven who loves us. We are all guilty of hypocrisy at some level. The gospel calls us to repent! This couple seemed to be ok with their hypocrisy! This should be a good warning to us not to be ok with our sin, as it is a serious matter before a Holy God!

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- **What are some ways that we Christians sometimes try to make others think that we are more spiritual than we actually are? What types of things do we say or do?**
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