

Integrity
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Acts 4:32-5:11

Opening discussion: What do we mean by the expression to “make an example” of someone? How does it come to play in our legal system? Is it right?

Big Idea: Followers of Christ need to take sin as seriously as God does; especially sin within the church and against God himself. God's grace hasn't removed His holiness and justice. In the early church God made an example of a husband and wife who were guilty of this kind of sin. It's a lesson for us all.

Acts 4:32–5:11 (ESV)

They Had Everything in Common

³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Ananias and Sapphira

5 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down

and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.
6 The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." 9 But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

- This is one of those "troubling" passages in scripture. Many are shocked by the severe judgment on this couple. We'll get into that shortly.
- First, let's see the context of what was happening in the early church.
- Last week we left off at verse 31. In spite of persecution by the religious leaders, we're told: *"they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."*
- Look at verse 32. **How does Luke describe the church?** It's really a picture of a well functioning family, isn't it?
- Verse 33 reiterates that "great power" from the Holy Spirit had led to "great grace upon them all." This was the catalyst for sharing the gospel.
- This power and grace also brought about the sharing of resources. In verses 34 and 35: **How did they handle financial needs in the church?**
- Verse 36 introduces us to Barnabas, "Mr. Encouragement." We'll hear a lot more about him later in Acts. In this account he's used as the "good example" as he sold a piece of property and donated the proceeds.
- It doesn't say Barnabas responded to a big appeal, or that he was compelled by the apostles to do this. He did it in response to the Spirit.
- What a beautifully functioning body of believers, powered by the Holy Spirit! Of course, Satan couldn't have this! This has to be stopped!

- Barnabas modeled Christian charity. Then there was Mr. & Mrs. Ananias!
- Verse 2: *“and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”*
- Let’s begin with motivation. **If this couple wanted the money, why did they even make any donation at all? What sin was at play?**
- Sinful pride led to sinful deception. This couple wanted the recognition and adulation of giving without giving up their cash! It started with PRIDE.
- One commentator writes: *“Indeed, it was pride that transformed Lucifer into Satan (Isa. 14:12–15), and it was pride (“Ye shall be as God!”) that caused our first parents to sin (Gen. 3). Pride opens the door to every other sin, for once we are more concerned with our reputation than our character, there is no end to the things we will do just to make ourselves “look good” before others.”¹*
- Where would that idea have come from (said the “church lady” on SNL)?
- Verse three: **How does Peter describe what motivated this deception?**
- It’s been said: *“...the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was energized by Satan (Acts 5:3); and that is a serious matter. If Satan cannot defeat the church by attacks from the outside, he will get on the inside and go to work.”²*
- Look at the contrast. The Spirit filled Barnabas, and others; this couple pushed out the Spirit and allowed Satan to fill their hearts!
- We’ve said that a believer receives the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at conversion and He never leaves. However if we can be “filled” with the Holy Spirit it stands to reason we can also be emptied of that power.
- Example: **What happens if I fill a balloon with helium? What happens if I fill it with air? Can I fill it with both at the same time? How does it appear in both cases?**
- It looks the same from the outside, but it acts differently depending on what’s filling it. I can’t fill it FULL with both at the same time. (Note: supposedly a helium balloon contains a mixture of both.)

- Here's a picture of spiritual warfare in the life of every believer. Your relationship with Christ is like a marriage where Satan is always nearby "seducing" us to replace the true love of our lives with his lies.
- Satan "seduced" this couple to cheat in their giving and lie about it.
- Let's look at verses three, four, and nine: We said pride was the first sin for this couple. **What other sins did this couple commit?**
- The Greek word for "Kept back is rendered *purloining*...means to *set apart for one's self*; hence to *appropriate wrongfully*."³ They embezzled.
- They lied. They were hypocrites with no integrity! **To whom did they lie?**
- Verse nine: **What was their sin? What does it mean to "test" God? Where else do we read about it?** (Luke 4:9; Deuteronomy 6:16)
- First part of verse four: **Why was the whole thing avoidable?**
- In verses five through ten we see that Peter confronts the couple separately and both drop dead with apparently with no chance to repent.
- Some speculate they died of shock upon being caught. The manner in which they were carried out and buried (with no funeral) indicates God's divine judgment.
- What a severe punishment! We see a few of these in the Old Testament:
 - o Nadab his brother Abihu (Aaron's sons) were consumed by fire for offering unholy fire before the Lord (Lev. 10:1–7; Num. 26:61).
 - o Uzzah - When the ark (of the covenant) started to slip from the cart, Uzzah put out his hand to steady it, and God struck him dead for touching the holy object (2 Sam. 6:6–7).
 - o Achan was discovered to be the guilty party, and he and his family were stoned to death (Josh. 7:25).
- What if every believer who is a hypocrite drops dead, or if every believer who holds back money from God's work drops dead? **Why was THIS situation worse than just being a fake or a deadbeat giver? How can we reconcile this example of such severe punishment?**

- *We read: "...their sin was especially wicked [because it] was directed against God's church. We have reason to believe that Ananias and Sapphira were believers.⁴ The fact that they were able to lie to the Spirit (Acts 5:3) and tempt the Spirit (Acts 5:9) would indicate that they had the Spirit of God living within.⁵"*
- The point: Sin against God's church results in severe judgment!
- Verse eleven: **What did God accomplish among the people?**

R.C. Sproul writes:

[Hard passages like this]... "make us say, 'How can God do something like this?' We are shocked by justice and presume upon grace. We are so accustomed to grace. Like the Israelites, we need God, ask for grace, receive it, forget it, and go back to sinning--despising God's holiness without fear of his judgment."⁶

"We are no longer amazed by grace and we are shocked--in total consternation--by justice. The essence of grace is that God is not required to give it to us. If you ever feel like God owes it to you, let a light go off in your mind that reminds you that you have just mixed up grace and justice.

The hand of God holds us over the pit of hell. And you can't give any reason for God to not drop you into that pit. If on the day of judgment, I look at Jesus and he says to me, "I don't know who you are. Please leave."--if that happens to me--I'll be surprised, but I also know this: I would have no ground for complaining about it. He is holy and I am not."⁷

So, What's the Takeaway?

- This is a "hard passage" that's directed at believers. If you're witnessing to friends and family you might not start here!
- But we need to know this. As Sproul says, we're all about God's grace and we tend to neglect His holiness. You don't "test" God and escape punishment. Note: Suffering in the life of a believer isn't always an indication of God's judgment!
- J.D. Greear gives us five lessons from this passage [http://www.jdgreear.com/my_weblog/2013/11/5-things-god-teaches-us-in-the-tragic-deaths-of-ananias-sapphira.html#_ftnref1]:

- 1 . In the church, there are two kinds of people, and it's nearly impossible to distinguish them from the outside.
 - 2 . We cannot hide from God.
 - 3 . The closer we are to grace the greater the offense of sin.
 - 4 . Fear is a part of worship.
 - 5 . Sin is a deadly serious matter to God.
- That last one is the bottom line. Believers are to take sin in the church and against the church very seriously. What an insult to the One who died for us if we don't!

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 422). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 422). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³ Vincent, M. R. (1887). *Word studies in the New Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 466). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 422). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁵ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 422). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁶ R.C. Sproul: <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/holiness-and-justice>

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