

The Danger of Deception



BETTER

ACTS 5:1-11

Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 422.

Acts 5:1-11 (NKJV)

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. ² 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. ³ 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? ⁴ 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."

⁵ Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. ⁶ And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*. ⁷ Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter answered her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?” She said, “Yes, for so much.” ⁹ Then Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband *are* at the door, and they will carry you out.”

¹⁰ Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying *her* out, buried *her* by her husband. ¹¹ So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

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George MacDonald wrote, “Half of the misery in the world comes from trying to look, instead of trying to be, what one is not.”

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The name that Jesus gave to this practice is “hypocrisy,” which simply 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.

Just Be Who You Are

That was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira: putting on a lovely “front” in order to conceal the shabby sin in their lives, sin that cost them their lives.

Just Be Who You Are

Ananias means “God is gracious,” but he learned that God is also holy; and Sapphira means “beautiful,” but her heart was ugly with sin.

It is worth noting that the Lord judges sin severely at the beginning of a new period in salvation history. Just after the tabernacle was erected, God killed Nadab and Abihu for trying to present “false fire” to the Lord (*Lev. 10*). He also had Achan killed for disobeying orders after Israel had entered the Promised Land (*Josh. 7*).

While God was certainly not responsible for their sins, He did use these judgments as warnings to the people, and even to us (*1 Cor. 10:11–12*).

“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Be Truthful!

Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, “Sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle which fits them all.”

To begin with, 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.

Pride Comes Before The Fall

Their sin was motivated by pride, and pride is a sin that God especially hates and judges.

Prov. 8:13 (NKJV)

“The fear of the Lord is to hate evil;

Pride and arrogance and the evil way

And the perverse mouth I hate.”

No doubt the church was praising God for the generous offering that Barnabas had brought when Satan whispered to the couple, “You can also bask in this kind of glory! You can make others think that you are as spiritual as Barnabas!” Instead of resisting Satan’s approaches, they yielded to him and planned their strategy.

Pride Comes Before The Fall

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.

The church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (*1 Tim. 3:15*), and Satan attacks it with his lies. The church is God’s temple in which He dwells (*1 Cor. 3:16*), and Satan wants to move in and dwell there too. The church is God’s army (*2 Tim. 2:1–4*), and Satan seeks to get into the ranks as many traitors as he can. The church is safe so long as Satan is attacking from the outside, but when he gets on the inside, the church is in danger.

It is easy for us to condemn Ananias and Sapphira for their dishonesty, but we need to examine our own lives to see if our profession is backed up by our practice. Do we really mean everything we pray about in public? Do we sing the hymns and Gospel songs sincerely or routinely? “These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me” (*Matt. 15:8*). If God killed “religious deceivers” today, how many church members would be left?

It's Not About The Money!

We must keep in mind that their sin was not in robbing God of money but in lying to Him and robbing Him of glory. They were not required to sell the property; and, having sold it, they were not required to give any of the money to the church (*Acts 5:4*).

Their lust for recognition conceived sin in their hearts (*Acts 5:4, 9*), and that sin eventually produced death.

James 1:14-15 (NKJV)

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.