

“THAT OLD TIME RELIGION”

“The Danger Of Deceit”

Scripture Reading – Acts, 4:34 – 5:11

There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles 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 to men but to God”. When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then the 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 agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! 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.

‘In everything set an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.’

Titus, 2:7-8, NIV

This series, based on THE BOOK OF ACTS, is entitled ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’.

The reason I want to call this series ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’ is that we need to look back in order that we might really look to the future. The old time religion needs to become the new time religion because it is the all time religion. If we get back to the basics of life in the Christian Church, we might better understand what the Holy Spirit can do in our hearts and lives today.

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The New Testament\Acts\That Old Time Religion\09 The Danger Of Deceit

THE BOOK OF ACTS is the story of success; the story of a church triumphant.

It is the story of a small group of uncultured and generally unlearned people with meagre resources – very little money, no prestige, and no church buildings. This small group of people went out to tell the story of a publicly executed Jew. They went out against great obstacles – the imperial might of the Romans, the intellectual sophistication of the Greeks, and the religious bigotry of the Jews. They turned the world inside out and upside down for Jesus Christ.

The Acts of the Apostles is the story of a church on fire with evangelism and growth...

“THE DANGER OF DECEIT”

The Church in THE BOOK OF ACTS was in the white heat of revival.

God was saving multitudes. Miracles, signs and wonders were being performed in the name of Jesus. The devil was doing all he could to prevent, if not destroy, this mighty movement of God. Satan came against the disciples with persecution – which did not work as the disciples went to Jesus. The more they went to Jesus, the more Jesus went to them, and the more power they had! Satan's intimidation drove the Church to her knees and his persecution was unsuccessful. Now Satan changes his strategy. Now he begins to work from within. If he cannot conquer the church, he will attempt to corrupt the church. He found two ready fifth columnist allies in Ananias and Sapphira.

Jesus is ‘THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE’.

Whereas Satan is ‘A DECEIVER’, ‘A LIAR’, and ‘THE FATHER OF ALL LIES’. When we tell the truth, we give God an opportunity to work, but when we tell a lie – whether or not we consider it a ‘little’ lie, or even a ‘white’ lie, or cross our fingers – Satan has already been working in us.

Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit.

What they did had tremendous impact on their lives and the lives of other Christians within the Church. In fact, we read that ‘**GREAT FEAR SEIZED THE WHOLE CHURCH**’, which implies that many of them were challenged to look deep inside their own hearts and lives in order to root out any hint of hypocrisy or phoniness at all.

1. THE ROOT OF THEIR SIN WAS PRIDE

‘There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.’

Acts, 4:34-35, NIV

Luke deliberately contrasts two different kinds of believers.

They could be called ‘GENUINE CHRISTIANS’ and ‘VIRTUAL CHRISTIANS’. A GENUINE CHRISTIAN lives out their faith from the heart; they are passionate about their Saviour and serve him because they want to. A VIRTUAL CHRISTIAN has the outward appearance of a Christian, but this is an illusion because the experience is not truly in their heart.

Barnabas was a genuine Christian, whilst Ananias and Sapphira were not... Barnabas had true Christian substance, whilst Ananias and Sapphira had exterior appearance; they looked the part. The problem was that inside they were rotten away...

'When it was launched in 1936, the Queen Mary was the largest ship to cross the oceans. For four decades and World War II, she served until she was retired and anchored as a floating hotel and museum in Long Beach, California. During the conversion, her three massive smokestacks were taken down in order to be scraped down to the metal and repainted. Whilst lying on the dockside they crumbled away. Nothing was left of the one-inch steel plate from which the smokestacks had been originally constructed. All that remained was more than forty coats of paint that had been applied over the years whilst the steel itself had rusted away.'

There was a great distress in the Church in Jerusalem at this time.

Revival had broken out and so many people wanted to know what was happening that they poured into Jerusalem. Many of them became Christians and decided to stay and learn more about their faith. They were not wealthy people; many of them were just common ordinary people. They had no place to go, and nothing to eat. As persecution arose, everything was in turmoil. There was a great need for financial resources in order to meet immediate needs.

'Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.'

Acts, 4:36-37, NIV

Barnabas sold the field that belonged to him, and gave the money to the apostles.

He saw a need and immediately moved in to meet that need. He had a piece of land and just sold it. Perhaps this was one of the acts of encouragement that earned him the nickname 'BARNABAS'. The truth is, he was happy to help out, even at great personal cost.

Barnabas's gift was a spontaneous act of love.

He was motivated by the Holy Spirit to do what he did. The Holy Spirit spoke to his heart and Barnabas just brought his gift. His giving was not mandated by the Church. His gift was not a requirement for membership of the Church. Although he did not give in order to receive the praise of men, he did not hide his gift either. It is a good spirit to have with regards to giving. We should not be ashamed of what we do for the cause of Christ Jesus, whilst, at the same time, we should not seek the praise of men.

'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.'

Acts, 5:1-2, NIV

Ananias and Sapphira wanted to bask in the glow of that gift.

They decided to do something similar, but had one difference. Whilst Barnabas gave all, they would give a proportion whilst pretending they were giving all. The root of their hypocrisy was

pride, and pride made these two characters a sitting duck for the devil. Ananias and Sapphira wanted to be praised as Barnabas was. They wanted the adulation of the congregation.

Daniel Defoe called pride 'THE FIRST PEER AND PRESIDENT OF HELL'.

It was pride that transformed Lucifer into Satan (see **Isaiah, 14:12-15**), and it was pride that caused our first parents to sin (see **Genesis, 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.

2. THE FRUIT OF THEIR SIN WAS PRETENCE

'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 to men but to God".'

Acts, 5:3-4, NIV

Ananias and Sapphira pretended a devotion they did not have.

They wanted credit for something they had not done. They were quite within their rights to have kept the property they owned, and no one in the Church would have thought any less of them. They were quite within their right to sell their property and keep all of the money, or a portion of the money from the sale. Ananias and Sapphira overstepped the mark and committed sin only when they claimed that what they were giving was everything, when in fact it was not!

ANANIAS means 'GOD IS GRACIOUS', but he learned that God is also holy.

SAPPHIRA means 'BEAUTIFUL', but her heart was ugly with sin.

'A minister made an appeal for a great and worthy cause, and a member of the church came to him and handed him a cheque for \$50, asking if her gift was satisfactory. The minister immediately replied, "If your gift represents you". There was a moment of soul-searching thought before she asked to have the cheque returned to her. A day later she returned handing the minister a check for \$500, and asking the same question, "Is my gift satisfactory?". The minister answered as before, "If your gift represents you". After a few moments hesitation, she took back the cheque and left. A day later she returned with a cheque for \$5,000 and the conversation was the same, as was the result when she took the cheque and left. The following day, she placed another cheque in the minister's hand and said, "After earnest, prayerful thought, I have come to the conclusion that this gift of \$50,000 really does represent me and I am happy to give it.'

Sometimes we do what is wrong and still seek agreement or understanding.

A member of my previous Corps came to me and handed me her cartridge envelope saying, "I have had to put my tithe down at the moment because I've got to spend money on such and such. That's okay, isn't it?". "So it's not a tithe?", I asked. "Yes, it's my tithe", came the reply. Well, it obviously wasn't her tithe, despite the claim, and she seemed quite surprised when I

said it wasn't okay. You see, no one should claim or pretend to give something when they are withholding it. It seems to me from this incident that God is not pleased with such claims.

'Half our misery comes from trying to look, instead of trying to be, what one is not.'
George MacDonald

This practice is 'HYPOCRISY'.

This is from the Greek 'HUPOKRISIS', which means 'WEARING A MASK' or 'PLAYING A PART'.
We must not think that failure to reach our ideals is hypocrisy, because no believer can realistically live up to all that he or she knows or has in the Lord. Hypocrisy is deliberate deception, trying to make people think that we are more spiritual than we really are.

'It is easy to condemn Ananias and Sapphira for 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? If God killed all "religious deceivers" today, how many church members would be left?'
Warren W Wiersbe

*We sing 'ALL TO JESUS I SURRENDER' but do we really mean what we are singing?
We sing 'TAKE MY LIFE AND LET IT BE' but do we really mean what we are singing?*

*From thee I would not hide my sin, because of fear
What men may think; I hate my pride, and as I am appear,
Just as I am, O Lord, not what I'm thought to be,
Just as I am, a struggling soul for life and liberty.*

Herbert Howard Booth, SASB 415:2

3. THE SOURCE OF THEIR SIN WAS SATAN

'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 to men but to God".'

Acts, 5:3-4, NIV

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was energized by Satan.

Satan knows how to lie to the minds and hearts of church members, even genuine Christians, and get them to follow his orders. We forget that the admonition about putting on the full spiritual armour of God (see **Ephesians, 6:10-18**) was written to God's people, not to unbelievers, because it is Christians who are in danger of being used by Satan to accomplish his evil purposes. Satan lied to and through this couple, and the lie led to their deaths.

DECEPTION

Satan found fertile soil when he found pride in Ananias and Sapphira.

You can almost hear Satan at work, whispering to Ananias, "Tell them that you are giving everything. They will never know the difference. How will anyone know it's not true? They will be so glad to receive something that they will rejoice in your gift".

When you lie, when you pretend, you are acting like the devil himself.

'Jesus said, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies".'

John, 8:44, NIV

DETECTION

'Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord?"'
Acts, 5:9a, NIV

The Holy Spirit heard Ananias and Sapphira discuss their plan.

He knew all about it. The same Holy Spirit revealed the matter to Peter, who had the spiritual gifts of 'DISCERNMENT' and 'KNOWLEDGE'. The Holy Spirit had warned them. As you read this whole passage, you can tell that they had not sinned ignorantly. They had not sinned carelessly. They sinned against light. It was not an unintentional mistake, it was a conspiracy, it was a wilful act and as such it was inexcusable. It was a direct challenge to the Holy Spirit and could not be allowed to pass unchecked.

DESTRUCTION

God's judgment passed on Ananias is severe.

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

Acts, 5:5-6, NIV

Three hours later, God's judgement passed on Sapphira is severe

'Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! 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.'

Acts, 5:9-11, NIV

There is no more vivid a story in THE BOOK OF ACTS.

There is no need to make a miracle of what happened, but it does show us something of the atmosphere which prevailed in the early Church. It is on record that once Edward I blazed with anger at one of his courtiers and the man dropped dead in sheer fear, but this event is much more than that.

This was the judgment of God given in an instant.

There was no opportunity for repentance. There was no opportunity for the Church to pray for forgiveness for the sinners. It just happened; immediately. I guess this is why they used to put graveyards near to churches?

Do you think Ananias and Sapphira were saved?

William M Pittendreigh, an American church minister, looked at this passage and wrote a sermon entitled 'THEY LIED ... THEY DIED ... THEY FRIED'. I have to disagree with his conclusion. They may have died, but that does not necessarily mean that they have been destroyed in the fires of hell. I think Ananias and Sapphira were saved because of the way God dealt with them.

God deals with his saints, with his servants, with his sons, immediately...

THE SINNER'S JUDGEMENT

We are judged as sinners at Calvary.

When Jesus died on the cross, I died there with him and Jesus took my judgment upon himself. I have settled my case out of court by receiving Christ as my personal Saviour. I did not plea bargain, because I came to him without one plea, save the blood of Jesus. God's judgment of me as a sinner has already passed and I praise God, because my sins were judged at Calvary.

'Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.'

Romans, 8:1-2, NIV

THE SERVANT'S JUDGEMENT

We are judged as servants at the Judgement Seat of Christ.

After I die, or when Jesus comes again, I am going to be caught up along with all believers to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. The Bible states that we must appear there so that we may receive the things done in our bodies, whether they be good or bad. This won't be a judgment to determine whether I go to heaven or hell. This is a judgment to receive my reward or realise my loss.

Not everyone will receive the same reward in heaven.

Jesus told us to lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven, a command that makes no sense whatsoever unless some receive more treasure than others.

'If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.'

I Corinthians, 3:12-15, NIV

THE SON'S JUDGEMENT

We are judged as sons right here in this life.

'You have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son". Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.'

Hebrews, 12:5-10, NIV

These verses are the reason I believe Ananias and Sapphira were truly saved.

Why did they die? Why did God judge them like this? They had sinned against God in the white heat of revival. Because they made a travesty of holy things, God judged them and took them home. They challenged the Holy Spirit and they knew that what they were doing was wrong. They were hypocrites and pretenders, but I think they were saved. I believe that God took them home so that Satan could no longer influence and control them. I believe that God took them home so that they could not commit worse sins. I believe that God took them home so that they could not disrupt the fellowship and witness of the Church.

The judgment of Ananias and Sapphira was a saving judgment.

'When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.'

I Corinthians, 5:4-5, NIV

The result of the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira was salvation.

'Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. No-one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.'

Acts 5:11-14, NIV

These people were a pure people and they were a praying people.

Because of this, God moved in with swift and strong judgment. I believe God saved Ananias and Sapphira from further sin and he saved the Early Christian Church from evil pollution. God used what happened to save the lost from hell.

DO NOT PRETEND... IF YOU ARE HAVING PROBLEMS, DON'T GET PROUD, PRAY!