

Session 7

AWE AND ADMIRATION

Acts 5:1-11

Memory Verse

“Ananias,” Peter asked, “why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds of the land?⁴ Wasn’t it yours while you possessed it? And after it was sold, wasn’t it at your disposal? Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart? You have not lied to people but to God.”

– ACTS 5:3-4, CSB




Awe and Admiration

THEOLOGICAL THEME: People cannot fool God. Wisdom seeks to grow in awe and admiration of Him, even as we grow closer to Him. God is holy and just, and we must remember that He cannot act contrary to His character. If we attempt to take advantage of His grace and mercy, there will be consequences.

Have you ever bought a purse, watch, or item of clothing that was a knockoff of a famous, more expensive brand? The streets of New York and other large cities are famous for these reproductions. Although an item might look the same on the outside, over time it usually becomes obvious that it is a cheap imitation.

The practice of passing off things as authentic but less expensive has been popular for ages and it also happens in the church. There are people who talk like believers and act like believers, yet there is something missing on the inside. People may try to pass off an imitation faith as real, but it will never fool the Lord, and He will bring the truth to light.

 When have you had an experience with buying a knock-off brand?

 What were some differences between the version you bought or saw and the real thing?

Session Summary


In the time following the miracle at Pentecost, the early church gathered and worshiped together. In the previous chapter of Acts, Barnabas brought a generous offering that showed his devotion to the Lord. In Acts 5, a couple made the decision to follow Barnabas's example, but their true motivation became clear. Instead of being honest about their gift, they attempted to deceive those present as well as the Lord. They took part of the money they received for some land they sold as an offering, but they presented it as the entire amount instead of just a portion.

God calls believers to give from their hearts under the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We should always maintain awe and admiration for the Lord that motivates us to give but also reminds us of His holiness. The state of the giver's heart is what matters most. When Ananias and Sapphira tried to impress the Lord and others by lying about their offering, there were severe consequences. Lying to the Lord will never pay off.

1. Holding Back (Acts 5:1-2)

The early church believers were gathered for worship and prayer after the events of Pentecost. Just prior to today's passage of study, Barnabas sold some land and brought the money as a gift (Acts 4:36-37). This sincere act of generosity drew attention and impressed the others. Ananias and Sapphira decided to do something similar but with the wrong motivation—they were looking for personal recognition, not to honor the Lord.

The difference in how Ananias and Sapphira gave was they held back some of the proceeds from their sale for themselves. But it is important to note that keeping back part of the money was not what caused the issue. Rather it was that Ananias and Sapphira tried to lie about the situation and fool people into thinking that they gave all the money they received from the sale.

 What are some ways people today might seek recognition in the same way Ananias and Sapphira did?

Scripture is clear that both Ananias and Sapphira participated in the attempted deception. They both wanted to be considered generous and impressive. People today often look for ways to create an impression that might gain them a level of respect without doing those things authentically. The Greek word for “kept back” means “misappropriation” (v. 2). Think about the different ways you might be guilty of keeping back something that needs to be given to the Lord. Any time we try to deceive God and hold onto things, whether money or other resources, it is a misappropriation and not pleasing to God.

? When have you been guilty of misappropriation in some way when it comes to giving to the Lord? Why is this always a bad idea in the end?


We miss the point of this account if we are too focused on the specific amount given by the couple. With God, it is not about the amount of money. Whenever you read about people giving tithes or offerings in Scripture, you will always see that God honors those who give with the right heart and mindset. He cares more about what is happening inside than He does with the outward appearance.

Ironically, Ananias and Sapphira—though seeking to look respectful—showed their disrespect for God by their deception. If they really knew and believed that God is holy and worthy of all admiration and worship, then they would not have gotten their priorities so out of line. When they shifted from worshiping God to wanting to impress their fellow church members, they set themselves up for failure. Offerings given with that mindset are not true worship and lying and deception bring consequences of their own.


? Application: Where might you be in danger of honoring God on the surface but not in your heart?

2. Honest Confrontation (Acts 5:3-4)

At times, a leader needs to confront ungodly behavior or attitudes. Peter is the one who called out the problem with Ananias and Sapphira. The Holy Spirit gave Peter the insight He needed to call out Ananias for his deception.

 Why is a loving confrontation a good thing? Why is it often difficult?

Think about how vastly different that day turned out than Ananias expected. What he orchestrated to bring himself accolades and favorable attention turned into a dramatic lesson of what not to do. Peter called him out publicly. Instead of being lifted up and praised by his fellow church members, he was called out for his wrong thinking and acting in front of those he was trying to impress. There are times leaders need to lovingly confront people either in private or in public. In this circumstance, Peter called Ananias out publicly because he sought to publicly deceive all those present that day.

 Why did Peter accuse Ananias of lying to the Holy Spirit and not merely to people?

Notice that Peter accused Ananias of lying to the Holy Spirit. That is the heart of the matter. We may think we will get away with something if we can deceive another person but whether the truth comes out in that moment or not, God always knows the truth and He is never deceived. This is also a reminder that whenever a person chooses to lie or sin in any way, that sin is ultimately against God. Ananias overlooked this truth and got caught up in his own greed and self-interests. Once he focused on attention for himself, he lost sight of his true purpose to worship and live for the Lord.

Peter also made it clear that the money for the field was Ananias's to handle. The sin was not in keeping some of the money back. The sin was in seeking recognition for extravagant generosity by saying they gave all they received from the sale. This couple was free to use their money in whatever way they deemed best. They could have donated half to the church and been fine. The problem came when they sought to elevate themselves through an act of deception. This sin that led to their downfall was totally unnecessary.

Peter's accusation to Ananias is interesting and gives food for thought for all believers in relation to the role of Satan in our sin. The enemy is real, and he attempts to lead us astray just as he did Ananias. Although Satan can influence believers to make wrong choices, he cannot make us sin. Any time a Christian sins, it is a personal choice. We do not get to blame the devil and claim that he "made us" do things. We have the choice daily of whether we will live under the power of the Holy Spirit or our own flesh. Any time we live by the flesh we will be more vulnerable to the influence of the enemy and more likely to face consequences as Ananias and Sapphira did.



Application: How can the reminder that all your sin is against God help you make more godly choices?

3. Hard Consequences (Acts 5:5-11)

Sin always has consequences. When Peter confronted Ananias for his sin and deception, he did not strike him dead. That was a consequence from the Lord. Though some might consider it to be a harsh punishment, this is an important reminder that God always takes sin seriously. This sin was insulting to the Lord and hurtful to the body of Christ. God deserves our respect, love, and admiration. Our focus needs to be on Him and living for Him daily, not on lifting ourselves up or seeking to impress others.

Scripture tells us that Ananias fell and breathed his last. While these consequences might surprise us, instead of thinking God is harsh in His punishment, we should consider how much grace He consistently gives by holding back His judgment on a world reveling in sin.

? Consider how God has given you grace when you deserved punishment for your sin. Share specific examples as you feel comfortable and as is appropriate.

It is important to note the critical timeline of the church in that day. It was a young church without deep roots. The people were seeking to figure out the difference in living by faith in Christ instead of living by the law. They needed protection from corruption and false teaching. It was crucial for certain parameters to be established in what was acceptable and not acceptable. When the people saw what happened to Ananias, they were filled with fear. We should never overlook the reverence due God.

? What inspires your awe toward the Lord? How is this stirred in you through His mighty works and through His grace?

Just a while after Ananias died, his wife came in. Peter questioned her to determine what role she played in the lying and deception. It became evident that she was an active and willing participant. God's judgment fell on her just as it did on her husband. It didn't matter who thought of the plan or maybe even pressured the other into going along. They both chose to lie and sin against God. The consequence for Sapphira was the same as for Ananias. God is full of mercy and grace, but He is fully righteous and holy too.

When Sapphira also dropped dead and was carried out, great fear came on all who heard about it. There is great benefit in healthy fear. It can keep us from danger. It can motivate us to make godly choices. Healthy fear also inspires awe in us. Seeing the supernatural and miraculous reminds us just how great and powerful God is. Ananias and Sapphira served as a reminder of this in their day.

? Application: How has healthy fear of God been a positive thing in your life?

Conclusion

Ananias and Sapphira tried to appear like they were doing more than they were. They sought to be thought of as impressive and generous. The problem was they got so focused on the wrong things that they mistakenly thought they could lie to God. In a world where pretense happens quite regularly, it is valuable to be reminded that even if you can fool people, you can never fool God. He knows our every motivation and the truth behind what we do. Instead of trying to elevate ourselves and lying to impress, we need to focus on knowing God and worshiping Him in Spirit and truth.

The early church was filled with fear when they saw how Ananias and Sapphira both dropped dead from their attempt at deceiving the Lord. God is all powerful and awe-inspiring. We need to stay focused on Him and who He is so that we continually live in awe and wonder of Him. Many people try to take advantage of the grace and mercy of God instead of recognizing that there are consequences to our sin. Ananias and Sapphira stand as a reminder of this reality.

? When was a time you were guilty of holding back something from the Lord? What is God saying to you about being authentic and living without pretense now?

? How do people take advantage of God's grace and mercy? Why is healthy fear a good thing?

? Who can you have a gospel conversation with regarding God's grace but also His holiness?

Here's How to Become a Christ-Follower:

Read the following verses and ask after each one: "What does this say to me?"

- **All have sinned:** Romans 3:23 & 1 John 1:8
- **The wages of sin:** Romans 6:23 & John 3:18
- **But while we were sinners, salvation was provided:** Romans 5:8
- **Become a Christ-follower:** Romans 10:9-10 Confess and Believe

Accepting Christ is Just the Beginning:

Next Steps:

- Publicly profess your faith by being baptized (Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 3:21; Romans 6:4).
- Join a church which follows the Bible, where you can grow in your faith through prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other Christians.
- Get involved in groups for encouragement and accountability.
- Begin a daily personal worship experience with God where you study the Bible and pray.
- Share with others what Jesus has done for you. Tell your story (Romans 10:14; Matthew 28:19-20).
- Begin to live for God (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; James 1:19-27).



FOR NEXT WEEK

Serve

Main Passages

- Acts 6:1-7; 1 Corinthians 12:12-20

Session Outline

1. The Need for Deacons (Acts 6:1-4)
2. The Selection of Deacons (Acts 6:5-7)
3. The Gifts of the Body (1 Corinthians 12:12-20)

Memorize

“Ananias,” Peter asked, “why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ Wasn’t it yours while you possessed it? And after it was sold, wasn’t it at your disposal? Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart? You have not lied to people but to God.”

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