

Introduction: Acts 4:32-37

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions were his own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. 34 There were no needy persons among them. From time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. 36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

After the arrest, trial, and release of Peter and John, a church-wide revival breaks out. Unity and joy radiate throughout the community. Outreach explodes with amazing boldness and power. Grace saturates and abounds! Led by the magnanimous example of Barnabas, voluntary and spontaneous sharing of possessions gushes to meet the material needs of the people. This is the community Jesus envisioned. This is the church we first read about back in Acts 2:44-45

45 All the believers were together and had everything in common.
45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

Devil's New Strategy

Last week in our Supernatural series we saw that where the church is advancing the devil is right there trying to sabotage it. His tactic of physical persecution failed miserably and only made the church stronger. Now he switches to an insidious strategy of attacking the church from the inside. As we dive into chapter 5, we see one of the most devastating things to happen to the church. In v1-2 we read

1 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. **2** 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.

The Deception and Death of Ananias

As others have before them, Ananias (God is gracious) and his wife Sapphira (beautiful) want to help the fledgling church financially. How many do you know God's grace is free, but his ministry is expensive, even back then! So, they liquidate some land holdings. On Fundraising Sunday, Ananias comes to church and lays his capital gains at the "apostles' feet." Guess they didn't pass offering plates back then either lol. Thinking he will be praised for his magnanimous gesture, he gets a tongue lashing from Peter, the lead apostle (v3-4)

3 "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? **4** 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."

Ananias wanted to gain a reputation as a generous person but to do so without being sacrificial. Thus, he purposely misrepresented the amount of his donation, making people believe he gave the total amount of the land deal when he only gave a portion. Donating only a portion would have been fine. There was no law that said if you liquidate an asset you are compelled to give the entirety of it to the church. In fact, he didn't have to give any of it because this was giving beyond the tithe, an offering for a special cause or circumstance.

Surprisingly, Peter does not take lightly Ananias' act of deception. He didn't say, "Well at least you gave something, you're awesome." Instead, he asks Ananias why he allowed Satan to fill his heart causing him to lie to the Holy Spirit. We saw this kind of demonic action before, when Satan entered Judas' heart to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3). Jesus called Satan the "father of lies" (John 8:44) and now,

through Ananias, he is trying to build a culture of lying within the church. When Peter subsequently tells Ananias that he lied not only to the Holy Spirit but also to God, it reminds us of something David confessed after his torrid affair with Bathsheba, “Against you and only you God have I sinned” (Psalm 51:4). All sin, no matter how big or small, is ultimately vertical in nature, i.e., against God himself. Ananias is caught red-handed. But before he can rationalize, apologize, or even pull out his credit card to give the rest of the money, God kills him. Could you imagine taking our offerings back to one of our giving boxes and people start keeling over dead? I guess we would call that reverse resurrection!

The Lying and Death of Saphira

Three hours later Saphira, a.k.a. Ms. Beautiful, shows up. Nobody knows why she wasn’t with her husband when he bought the farm. Perhaps she was out on shopping spree with the funds that her husband claimed he dedicated to the church. She enters the church, oblivious as to what happened. Fully expecting to receive applause for her amazing generosity she, instead, gets a F.B.I. level interrogation from Peter, who has yet to develop any pastoral skills.

8 “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?” “Yes,” she said, “that is the price.” 9 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.” 10 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.

The Achan Precedent (Joshua 7)

In this day of consumer Christianity, people leave churches for all sorts of reasons. Exiting because you are literally slain by the Holy Spirit is probably not the healthiest or most popular. As surprising as killing of wealthy liars may there’s a precedent in the O.T. In Joshua 7, Achan steals some Babylonian loot, booty, and plunder, an act strictly forbidden by God. The next day Israel gets crushed by an inferior enemy in the Battle of Ai. Joshua is devastated and asks God why? God tells him that Achan’s deception caused Israel to lose, and if his deception is not dealt with, Israel will get wiped out again tomorrow. Joshua summons Achan. He confesses his sin and thus is immediately stoned to death. The next day Israel attacks Ai and wins easily.

The Reason

Other than God always knows the motivations of our hearts. Other than God “takes pleasure in honest lips” but “despises a lying tongue” (Proverbs 6:17, 13) Other than every sin in the church negatively impacts everyone else. Other than the “love of money is the root of all evil” (I Timothy 6:10) and why the greatest temptation for church folks is to look good, especially when giving. Other than God’s judgement “begins in his church” (I Peter 4:17). Why did God take such drastic action against Ananias and Sapphira for the seemingly small sin of misrepresenting what they gave? Far worse sins were committed that were not met with such grave circumstances, so what gives here? In John 14:6 Jesus entitled himself as “The Way, Truth, and Life.” Although we may emphasize “Way” and “Life” more than “Truth” Jesus was determined that his baby church begin as a culture of truth, i.e., that his people be thoroughly and authentically truthful in their spirituality, ethics, and morality. This is what Paul meant in 1 Timothy 3:15

**You will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household,
which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.**

Conclusion

As we see in Scripture anything built on lies or half-truths eventually deteriorates and dies. Only truth and truthfulness prevail. If Ananias and Sapphira's dishonesty were glossed over by the early church, it would have never made it out of the 1st century. V5, 11 tells us that their sudden transition into the afterlife super shocked the community. While God may not take us out suddenly, he will certainly be disappointed. Whether it is in this world or the next, God will hold us accountable for lying.

If there's one thing God doesn't tolerate it is Christian liars.

Whatever happens to you, don't be one of them!