

Hypocrisy or Purity?

Grace Bible Chapel

Outline: The Acts of the Apostles – Acts 4:36-5:11
August 27th, 2017

Context: The last time we met on Acts we looked at “Christianity on Display” out of Acts 4:32-35. It was a beautiful picture of a church functioning because of transformed hearts acting in faith and love. This Sunday the narrative (5:1-11) shows us a contrast of “Hypocrisy on Display.” People pretending to be and do according to right motive instead are demonstrating a false view and attitude of Christianity.

Our text begins with the account of Barnabas and his gracious gift motivated by love (4:36-37). The lack of discussion shows the genuine nature of his gift as given with a right loving motive. This is followed by the account of Ananias and Sapphira. Their gift was obviously not given in right motive. It was not only given with a false claim, but was intended to bring attention to them rather than to show the love of Christ. The serious nature of this falsehood is exemplified by the action taken through Peter by their judgment of God striking them dead. The Lord is showing in the strongest manner that He will have a pure church, and that hypocrisy of any form has no place among those claiming Christ.

Broad outline of Acts (underlined is the immediate context).

- VI. The Power Needed (Acts 2:1-6:7)
 - F. Second Message (Acts 3:1-4:22)
 - G. Sovereign forming (Acts 4:23-6:7)
 - 7. Selfless by their actions (Acts 4:34-35)

Pre-intro:

- Last time I spoke at worship viewed Christianity on display (4:32-35).
 - What we viewed was a change from the inside out – new heart – new thinking – new actions. It was so different it was used of God to make significant lasting testimony & impact on the then world – many were being added to their number.
 - It was a glorious situation – a little heaven on earth (Vs. 33) sums it well.
 - Today will finish up this beautiful picture with the example of Barnabas, then we will see Satan come with a new form of attack on the church – not from the outside as seen in the persecution & jailing earlier in chapter 4, but this time from the inside – God will intervene – big lessons here for us!

Introduction:

- What do you expect the church to be? Many expect it to be a place of rigid religious ideas, others where you go to feel good about yourself, still others think of it as a place full of stuffed shirts & hypocrisy – what does the Bible say is the essential substance of the church (1 Tim. 3:15)?
 - Household of God – it is heaven set apart on earth – an incubator, an oasis – God’s testimony / His work in its most pure & obvious form on earth.
 - Church of (an assembly) from the living God – possesses real life – saved life.
 - Pillar & support of the truth – with the Bible (Christ) at its core - a place of total honesty, reality, genuineness – light (in contrast to the surrounding darkness).
 - Church is to be the extension of Christ’s work on the earth (Mat. 28:19-20).

Point: The church (God’s people & local assemblies) are to reflect Jesus Christ – that is our incredible responsibility & role.

- We are studying the beginnings of the church following Christ’s work & ascension.
 - Christ stated He would build it & the gates of hell would not prevail (Mat. 16:18).
 - In our text God is moving majestically – these early Christians have already been threatened & jailed, we have seen their overcoming testimony & it continues in our immediate text, but another test is coming – not unlike Judas – a test of purity!
8. **Standard of Purity** (4:36-5:11) – first we see the real work of God – an example!
- **Sweet motive** (4: 36-37) – this is instructive narrative.

Key Words

- price
- lied
- buried
- Holy Spirit
- great fear



- **Vs. 36 - 37** – Barnabas – by his very name we see he has a great testimony – we will see him used later in Chapter 9 introducing Paul & then becoming his significant traveling companion always proving his name – son of encouragement.
 - We are not given much detail – but because of the lack of negative narrative – we know this is our righteous example – I called it a sweet motive (2 Cor. 2:14) from Paul a righteous testimony “a sweet aroma in every place” it is seen.
 - He was obviously a wealthy man – now he uses his God given resources.

Point: Here is someone moved from within, with righteous motive, not out of being harangued or from selfish pride, or to be showy for personal glory – he lovingly gives – his catalyst is his new heart, & love to Christ, & his fellow struggling brethren!

Point: Not going to dwell here – if you are in Christ, you will know when you need to act, & what to do – not from selfish motive, but from God’s Spirit within you!

- **Sordid motive** (Vs. 5:1-11) – but now we have the lesson learning contrast!
- Satan is in the counterfeit business – he comes in packages wrapped like the genuine, but always with something rotten & unbecoming the church in the light!
- **Spurious display** (5:1-2; 7-8) – meaning untrue, not genuine – not as purported.
- **Vs. 5:1** – “But” – informs this is a purposeful contrast in this narrative.
 - We have a man & wife – great to have two people agree – a right union, & here they agree to sell an asset, like Barnabas, & give it to the church – so far it looks perfect, commendable, & a great testimony – so far!
- **Vs. 5:2** – “kept back” – there is nothing whatever wrong with keeping it back, as we have heard read from Peter’s statement in verse 4.
 - They were under no compulsion to sell it, or give it (2 Cor. 9:7). What one is always called to do is first give themselves (see 8:5) – the mindset of right coming to Christ.
 - There is nothing wrong on the surface here – they gave a portion to the church, which is commendable – so what is wrong – why must we call this a spurious display? Their motive as will be seen is not love but to gain spiritual prestige.
 - In Vs. 5:3 – Peter’s God inspired clarity “lie to the HS” – your offense is not insignificant – you have lied to God. A lie cannot live with the purity of God.
- **Vs. 5:7** - Jump to Sapphira to further clarify the significant nature of the lie.
 - She is ignorant of what happens to her husband. She comes into the presence of the Apostle Peter.

Point: Let’s keep in mind the apostles were left to continue Christ’s work, & be used at times supernaturally by the power of Christ to prove it as God’s work. We learn here their role also in protecting the start-up church!

- **Vs. 5:8** - She is questioned by Peter – the two had together conspired to look big before others – they wanted to counterfeit Barnabas’s testimony for themselves!
 - Is this a big deal? We might be led to conclude, what difference does it make?
 - Of the churches I grew up in – some had plaques on the wall – this wing of the church building was given by Betty Smith, or bricks with names.
 - When I was involved in marketing at my secular job – the retailers knew people would donate to causes if their name was displayed – so store windows were stickered with people donating to whatever the cause.
 - Mat. 6:1-4 – The practice of love must have a pure motive or it is not pleasing to God.

Point: The purity of motive in the church is obviously immeasurable to our God. I begin this with the purpose of the church “the pillar & support of the truth.” There can be no counterfeit, no heresy, no false pretense, no charades before God.

Point: This scenario alone marks out the fact the church must be pure – driven by the pure motive of love for God, and thereby love for others!

- **Spiritual analysis** (5:3-4; 7-9a)
- **Vs. 5:3-4** – first we look Ananias – reminded though the husband & wife conspired together, they stand before God as individuals – so do we!
- **Vs. 5:3** – this is so important to God, that He gave Peter the insight to know what Ananias had done. “But” again shows the contrast with how things appeared at the end of Vs. 2 – “laid it at the apostles feet” – a duplicate of what Barnabas did.
 - Notice what is really behind this – “why has Satan filled your heart” – who by contrast had filled Barnabas heart with love? – the HS!
 - What was Ananias really doing – “to lie to the Holy Spirit” The church is “set-apart” – sacred – what we do here must be considered immeasurably sacred.
- **Vs. 5:4** – Peter makes it clear – the issue is not whether Ananias gave, or how much Ananias gave, but the fraudulent motive of his heart behind it.
 - “You have not lied to man but to God” – I have noted over the years of being in church leadership, people with weak professions ignore or disregard this!
 - It matters little by comparison what each one of us thinks in regard to one another, what really matters is God’s assessment / His knowledge of us!

Point: Are you concerned foremost about your relationship to God – He knows you & me, we cannot bluff Him! No one here is sinless, but are you coming to Him continually casting yourself before Him for His cleansing & straightening (1 John 1:9).

Point: This reminds me there are – as someone stated “hypocrites in the church, but there will be no hypocrites in glory – at least none that not forgiven by Christ.”

- 1 Cor. 11:27-31 – here are people approaching the Lord’s table with wrong motive – this table is sacred because of who it represents. God does not require us to be sinless, but He does require us to be honest before Him.
- One of the obvious purposes is cleansing – we meet with God around this table which forces us to examine ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28).

Point: This also reminds me that if God held the church openly accountable now 1900+ years later, in the similar manner as initially, I am not sure how many of us would be here today – maybe it would be an empty building.

- Who is it the Lord looks to (Is. 66:2) “to this one...trembles at My Word” – He requires integrity in our motive – a motive of faith & love cannot be in union with fraud, deceit, & self-centeredness rather than a motive of thankful love.

Point: If my coming to worship is something selfish, some twisted idea of personal gain - anything other than a desire to know Him, Worship Him, express my love to Him, please Him – then we are fooling ourselves, & we will never fool God.

- **Vs. 5:7-9a** – Sapphira enters the scene – the importance shown is how purposely they are committed together to benefit their reputation as Christian philanthropist.
 - A self-centered lie – using the church as a means of marketing self.

Point: the church built on Christ is truth, integrity, reality, not falsehood in any form!

- **Vs. 8** – Peter questions Sapphira – “yes this was the price” – she had the opportunity to confess & correct, no semblance of regret –unhesitant she lies!
- **Vs. 9a** – “Why is it you have agreed together” – this lie, this motive, was so important to you, you have agreed together – in other words it was premeditated & overt!
- They have wickedly connived to gain personal advantage.
- “”to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test” – what are they really doing? Well, it is just a little white lie – no harm done. No, they in the name of the sacred work of Christ are perpetrating a purposeful fraud – directly offending God!

Point: People get together around lies, untruth, evil every day. There are huge numbers of people getting together politically& spiritually embracing untruth & evil – convinced it does not matter, & they will get away with it – “be sure ...out” (Num 32).

- **Serious consequence** (5:5-6; 9b-10) How do we know it is so offensive to God?
- The fact of the reaction by God in this earliest era of the church – God demonstrates His righteous reaction at the outset & He hasn't changed!
- **Vs. 5:5** – “and as he heard these words” – what words? Vs. 4b – “you have...God.”
 - “fell down and breathed his last” – God took his life away immediately!
- **Vs. 5:6** – If there was any doubt – “they buried him” – the abrupt significance & finality of this could not be more swift, more dramatic, or with more emphasis!
- **Vs. 5:9b** – Look at Sapphira – “behold the feet...as well” – those burying Annanias arrived just in time to do the same for her.
- **Vs. 5:10** – “immediately she fell dead” – we be reminded who is in charge of our every breath? The Lord God – our times are in His hands!
 - **Sobering result** (5:11)
- **Vs. 5:11** – at the end of Vs. 5 “fear came over all” – here in Vs. 11 “great fear.”
 - God does not strike people dead in the church today, at least overtly.
 - But, make no mistake, the same God has the same strong judgment today opposing self-centered attitudes & actions in the church by His name.
 - We are warned by this narrative – the most dangerous place is a church where Christ is not really honored, a place of hypocrisy – why? This is Satan's tactic–Vs. 5:3 “Satan filled your heart” – to defraud genuine Christianity.

Closing:

- Consider the way churches market their programs in our culture, their “me & my” self centered fulfillment, their compromising of doctrine to be friends of the world. This is no different than Ananias & Sapphira.
- We must always examine our motive.
- God shook the early church, gave example - purposely showed the need for purity!
- What we need today is to understand the depth of sin, the need of Christ – that our God is a holy God. Needed a righteous fear of the Lord in all our thinking / living!
- We need a renewed focus on personal worship integrity– (1 Pet. 4:7-11).
- Recognize what is important - serve the Lord now from the heart in purity & put away all hypocrisy?