

## Lying to The Holy Spirit (Acts 4:32-5:11)<sup>a</sup>

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### Today's Passage<sup>1</sup>

- Acts 4:32 - *Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.*
- Acts 4:33 - *And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.*
- Acts 4:34 - *Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold,*
- Acts 4:35 - *and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.*
- Acts 4:36 - *And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus,*
- Acts 4:37 - *having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.*
- Acts 5:1 - *But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.*
- Acts 5:2 - *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.*
- Acts 5:3 - *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?"*
- Acts 5:4 - *"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."*
- Acts 5:5 - *Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.*
- Acts 5:6 - *And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.*
- Acts 5:7 - *Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.*
- Acts 5:8 - *And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much."*
- Acts 5:9 - *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."*
- Acts 5:10 - *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.*
- Acts 5:11 - *So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.*

### The importance of understanding context and the full teaching of Scripture

1. **Is Luke indicating that socialism or communism are Christian ideals and that the Bible is opposed to the private ownership of property?**
  - A. **Used to support *liberation theology*, which has had strong Marxist connections, and believes it finds Biblical sanction for the redistribution of wealth.**
2. **How do we know this passage cannot be a mandate for socialism or communism?**
  - A. **OT basis for private property. Consider the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment:**
    - I. **Exodus 20:17 - *You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.***

- B. Here and throughout Scripture, giving was purely voluntary: unlike socialism or communism
  - I. Deuteronomy 15:7-8 - *If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.*
- C. Consider our own country, founded upon Christian principles, as a *democracy*, not as a socialist or communist system (although it is getting increasingly hard to tell!)

### 3. Specific historical context

- A. Pentecost (late May, AD 33<sup>2</sup>): thousands of visiting Jews came to faith (Acts 2:41)
- B. This passage (early-mid AD 34<sup>3</sup>): in which many visitors, who originally came for Pentecost without plans of remaining, still remained in Christian fellowship in Jerusalem
  - I. Acts 2:44-45 - *Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.*
- C. Also, the expectation of an imminent return of Jesus, which has since been tempered by history

**What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? Failure to dedicate all their resources for the use of the needy in the early church?**

1. Everything was voluntary, not compulsory
2. Problem was not keeping back part the proceeds
3. Problem was misrepresenting what they gave: misrepresenting their works, possibly to appear more spiritual or as having greater zeal.
  - A. Acts 5:3-4 - *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? 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."*
  - B. Acts 5:8-9 - *And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much." 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."*
  - C. God hates religious hypocrisy, *Fervent lips with a wicked heart Are like earthenware covered with silver dross (Pr. 26:23).*
  - D. Wanted to appear like Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37), but lacked his true character and zeal. Wanted similar acclaim, but without true sacrifice.
  - E. J. Vernon McGee
    - I. "I have found that there are people who will give in order to be noticed. I recall a

meeting with businessmen in Pasadena when I was a pastor there. We were planning to start a youth organization, and we were asking these men to give donations for the founding of this movement. It was decided that donations would not be made public. I was informed that one of these men would contribute very little if he were not given the opportunity to speak out publicly to let everybody know how much he was giving. It is quite interesting that he contributed a small amount. After the meeting he confided in one of the men that he had intended to give about ten times that amount, but he had expected to be able to stand up or at least raise his hand to indicate how much he had given. You see) pride is still in human nature today. That was the condition of Ananias and Sapphira.”<sup>4</sup>

## Why so severe?

1. Why don't spiritual hypocrites in today's church drop dead like Ananias and Sapphira?
2. Obviously, there is something different about this situation
3. OT examples
  - A. Israel in the wilderness - complaint and lack of trust
    - I. Numbers **11:1** - *Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.*
    - II. Numbers **11:31-34** - *Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quail from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground. And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague. So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah [graves of those who desired], because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.*
    - III. The nation being birthed out of Egypt and learning to trust in God for all things
  - B. Nadab and Abihu
    - I. Leviticus **10:1-7** - *Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.'" So Aaron held his peace. And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp." So they went near and carried them by their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had said. And Moses said to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons, "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people. But let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the LORD has kindled. "You shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.*

## II. The establishment of the Aaronic priesthood and the worship of God, recognizing His holiness

### C. Transporting the Ark

- I. The Ark had been without tabernacle or temple—having been previously given over, by God, into the hands of the Philistines (1S. 4:17-22).
- II. **2 Samuel 6:2-7** - *And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, whose name is called by the Name, the LORD of Hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. So they set the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill, accompanying the ark of God; and Ahio went before the ark. Then David and all the house of Israel played music before the LORD on all kinds of instruments of fir wood, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on sistrums, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God.*
- III. Even though Uzzah's motive and zeal were commendable, his approach to God was uninformed — we cannot simply approach God “any old way” we see fit!
- IV. The Ark had remained in Abinadab's house for at least 20 years (1S. 7:2), yet this seemingly “minor incident” resulted in the loss of one of his sons!
- V. Without the Ark or tabernacle, the people had grown cavalier in their approach to God.
- VI. Once again, the people experienced a painful reminder concerning God's holiness and judgment

#### 4. What do these situations have in common?

- A. Formative, critical periods of transition in the plan of God
- B. Pentecost: the birth of the Church, the Body of Christ - a new spiritual organism in the plan of God
- C. The death of Ananias and Sapphira underscored the authority of the Apostles, in the absence of Jesus, as divinely-sanctions leaders of the fledgling Church
  - I. Miracles at the hands of the Apostles (Acts 2:43; 5:12; 2Cor. 12:12)
  - II. Spiritual revelation - both scriptural and practical (informed about the lie)
  - III. Judgment
    - a. Result: fear, resulting in respect
      - i. Acts 5:5 - . . . So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.
      - ii. Acts 5:11 - So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.
      - iii. Acts 5:13 - Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.

## D. The balance

- I. **Acts 9:31** - *Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.*

### Application

#### 1. Religious hypocrisy

- A. Among all the sins that God detests, religious hypocrisy seems to be singled out as particularly offensive to God.<sup>5</sup>
- B. Like Ananias and Sapphira, if we misrepresent the truth among God's people, we too are guilty of testing the Spirit of the Lord — of imagining our deception or omission can remain hidden.
- C. How wise can it be to misrepresent what is really going down to pastors or other Christians when God, being omniscient and omnipresent, sees it all?
- D. Jesus told the church of Laodicea, *I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth* (Rev. 3:15-16).

#### 2. Let's not be naïve concerning the nature of Christian fellowship

- A. The professing church consists of both believers and unbelievers—although the latter will usually claim and act as believers.
- B. Even among true believers, honesty and transparency will not always prevail.
- C. “Two persons may perform the same act, but in the eyes of God it may be far from being the same. Both Cain and Abel brought offerings unto the Lord. Ananias and Barnabas alike sold land for the benefit of the poor. Where there is light, there will also be a shadow. Where God builds a church, the devil builds a chapel at its side. Where the divine householder sowed good seed, the enemy afterwards sowed tares, Matt. 13:25.—There was a traitor among the apostles of Jesus, and a hypocrite in the bosom of the primitive church; such a form the visible church at all times assumes.”<sup>6</sup>

#### 3. A too-casual view of God?

- A. Ananias and Sapphira were killed in the “age of grace”<sup>7</sup>
- B. Are we at risk of losing a proper fear and reverence for God and assuming an overly casual approach to God—characterized by cultural norms rather than Biblical truth?

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#### Endnotes:

1. NKJV, Acts 4:32-5:11
2. Ref-1307, 342-345
3. Ref-1307, 342-345
4. Ref-0465, Acts 5:1
5. Concerning religious hypocrisy : Ps. 78:36-37; Pr. 26:23; Isa. 48:1; 1:13; 58:2-4; Jer. 3:10; 7:9-10; 9:8; 11:15; 12:2; 42:20; Eze. 23:37-39; 33:31-32; Hos. 11:7; Mal. 2:11-14; Mat. 23:3-8,13-16,25-33; Rom. 2:21-24.
6. Ref-1304, Acts (p. 87)
7. John 1:17

#### Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0465** McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- Ref-1304** John Peter Lange, Philip Schaff, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008).
- Ref-1307** Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 2011). ISBN:978-0-7586-2799-5<sup>d</sup>.

#### Links Mentioned Above

- a - See [http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts\\_by\\_Tony\\_Garland/18\\_Acts\\_4\\_32-5\\_11/index.htm](http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/18_Acts_4_32-5_11/index.htm).
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.
- d - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0-7586-2799-5>.