

Things were going great at this time in the early Church. Miracles, baptisms, and growth. This was a pivotal time in church history. The believers in the early Church were “one in heart and mind” because God’s grace was working powerfully in them. More and more people were getting saved and joining the body of Christ and experiencing the power of God in profound ways. The lost were accepting Christ, the needy were being ministered to, and the new Church shared a common purpose. Generosity was the mark of the first-century Church. The Book of Acts is the record of the early Church, and it was going well. Barnabas, whose name meant “Son of encouragement” is noted for his selfless act of giving, something he wasn’t “required” to do. Seems like someone wants to rain on his parade ... or at least, start their own.

3. Read Acts 5:1-11. Who are the main characters? What do we know about them? (Do you see why Barnabas’ gift is mentioned? It laid the foundation and put their act in context.) What other important facts of the story do you notice?

4. According to verses 1 and 2, was Sapphira aware of what her husband did?

As someone once said, “They were agreed with each other, but not with God.” Unlike Adam and Eve who just blamed each other, these guys had a plan.

5. If they weren’t “required” to give all they had, what was the actual sin? (Why do you think they kept some back? Was that wrong?)

6. How do you think Peter knew Ananias wasn’t telling the truth?

7. When Peter confronted him, who does he say Ananias sinned against?

8. Enter Sapphira. Does Peter give her a chance to come clean?

9. What were your first thoughts when you read what happened to them?

10. What was the result of this incident, according to verse 11?

Today we simply looked at the facts of the story. Tomorrow we'll get into more details. This is a pretty crazy story, right? As we look behind their masks and read between the lines, we will get a better understanding of why their judgment is so drastic. I pray that we ask the Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts to see how we can apply this story to our lives. God doesn't seem to "kill" for lying anymore ... or does He?

Memory Verse of the Week: "Therefore put away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another." Ephesians 4:25

Second Day

Work on your memory verse. Both in word and in action

1. Read Acts 5:1-11. They were guilty of committing a few sins, obviously. Can you name a few?

2. Let's look at the obvious one first. Why do you think they lied? What were they hoping to gain from it? Was it a spur of the moment thing, or was it premeditated?

Whether Peter received insight from the Holy Spirit, or he could tell Ananias was lying because of the look on his face, we don't know. That part of the story isn't really what matters, but what this couple did was "the first open venture of deliberate wickedness in the early church." They were deceived by Satan, much like Adam and Eve, and quick to try to cover their lies.

3. Do you think pride or desire for glory played a part in the reason they lied? What may have been some of the excuses they used with each other to justify their deceitful act??

4. Read the following verses on lying. Yikes, they're good ones!
 - a. Proverbs 12:22
 - b. Proverbs 19:9
 - c. Proverbs 10:17
 - d. Colossians 3:9-10
 - e. Luke 8:17

I love what one author wrote, "Honesty isn't the best policy; it's the only policy." Let's tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, shall we? Let's make that choice, always.

5. It's often said they were trying to appear more spiritual than they were, desiring that others look upon them favorably and with awe, much like they did Barnabas. Kent Hughes calls this a "spiritual deception, a pious pretense, a religious sham, a simulated holiness, and a Christian fraud." Name some ways that we, as believers, can be guilty of this today.

So often we want to be noticed, applauded, and respected by others. Often we desire the praise of men much more than the approval of God. This hunger for approval can cause us to compromise our integrity, our honesty, and our character.

6. Ask the Spirit to show you if there are any areas of "spiritual pretense" in your life. Are you trying to appear more spiritual than you are? Do you desire to be seen by people a certain way, so you exaggerate or "color" a story?

7. Why can it be such a struggle to want others to see our good deeds? Why is it so hard to give and not expect anything in return?

8. How does our culture perpetuate this?

9. Peter tells them both that they lied not only to men, but to God Himself! Read Psalm 51:3-4. Who else learned this lesson the hard way?

Peter wasn't accusing or judging Sapphira, simply asking her the question, giving her opportunity to bring her deed into the light. But sadly, she did not. She stuck to the story and would be held accountable. I think it's important to point out that no matter whose "idea" it was, they were judged separately. We will all stand alone before the judgment seat of Christ and answer for our actions. We can't blame our husbands or our friends for our actions. No "he made me do it" will work, my friend.

10. Last question for today. Do you think the punishment fit the crime? Kent Hughes calls it "sanctifying discipline." What does he mean by that?

It was obviously necessary for God to strike fear in the hearts of the early Church. It was a divine warning of the trueness of God's purity, His wrath, and His justice. Satan obviously was trying to disrupt the unity of the early church, and he was hoping to be successful by using men and women "inside" the Church to do it. God's glory was at stake. The story is quite similar to what happened in Joshua 7 when a man named Achan did the same thing. You can read it if you have time. God was setting a pattern of holiness during that crucial time period as well. God has always been concerned with His reputation, and how our personal holiness reflects that.

Third Day

Work on your verse.

1. Read Acts 5:1-11 again. Both Ananias and our lady friend dropped dead. The Greek word translated is "gave up the ghost." It's the same word used in Acts to describe sudden, terrible, judicial death. This was divine judgment. What effect do you think this had on the early Church? What emotions did they probably feel? (People probably knew them, friendships had developed, etc.) Look at 5:11-14.

A word we haven't discussed yet is "hypocrite" although I'm sure you've already brought it up! The definition is "to be seen by men," and the Greek word for hypocrite literally means "actor." It means to put on a false face. Jesus spoke very intensely to the Pharisees about being hypocrites. It seemed like nothing angered Him more than the "religious" trying to pretend they were better than they were. In Matthew 15:8-9, Jesus said, "These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

2. Read Matthew 23:1-12 and Titus 1:16. What are some characteristics of a "hypocrite"?

I love this paragraph from Kent Hughes. It makes us understand a bit better how this can look during our day and age. He wrote, "Ananias and Sapphira feigned a deeper spiritual commitment than they had. We share their sin not when others think we are more spiritual than we are, but when we try to make others think we are more spiritual than we are. Examples of their sin today include: creating the impression that we are people of prayer when we are not; making it look like we have it all together when we don't; promoting the idea that we are generous when we are so tight we squeak when we smile; misrepresenting our spiritual effectiveness (for example, saying "When I was at a Crusade in New York, I ran the whole follow-up program," when the truth is, you were a substitute counselor); when a preacher urges his people toward a deeper devotion to God, implying his life is an example when in actuality he knows it is not; when an evangelist calls people to holy living but is secretly having an affair with his secretary. This gives us a lot to think about, if we dare."

3. Are there any areas in your life where you can possibly be a hypocrite? Whether purposely or not, ask the Spirit to show you. Do you tend to exaggerate stories so they appear "more exciting"? Do you portray yourself as one way when you're not?
4. Social media is extremely important in our culture today. People often portray themselves differently than they really are. Are you guilty of doing this? Why are we so prone to want to look better than we are?
5. If you have children, are you teaching them the principle of honesty, even on their social media? How can we help them learn this? When they (or we) create a "false us," what can happen? How can it be dangerous?

In her book, Bad Girls of the Bible, Liz Curtis Higgs uses an example of a time when she was undercharged for a book she bought. She noticed the price difference after the purchase was complete. She was at the airport, in a hurry, and knew it would take a lot of time to correct the mistake. As she puts it, she made up every excuse and rationalized away all the reasons she simply did not have time to tell the cashier, telling herself why her choice was fair and acceptable. It's actually a funny story as she explains the mind games and mental gymnastics she plays as she sits on the plane, telling herself that it was simply an accidental bargain. Then the Holy Spirit brought James 4:17 to her mind, and she was disgusted with herself. She wrote, "Instead of a simple bit of business at the register that would have left the clerk grateful for my honesty and me three dollars poorer in cash but much richer in spirit, I carried my shame around with me all weekend. Even the joy of reading the pretty book diminished every time I opened it and saw the correct price boldly printed on the slipcover." She goes on to say she repented, found the receipt, and sent a check off for the difference. But her point is well taken. "withholding money, acting as though it's mine to do with as I please when everything I own belongs to Him, leaves me shaking my head in disgust." Has this ever happened to you?

6. What are your thoughts on the paragraph above? Do you see the correlation between keeping money that isn't ours with what Sapphira did?

Sorry to share another paragraph, but I can't write it better than Max. Max Lucado says, "Honesty has its consequences. Our dislike for the truth began early on when Mother walked into our room and asked, 'Did you hit your little brother?' Well, that all depends on how you interpret the word hit. I mean, sure I made contact with him, but would a jury consider it a hit? The truth, we learn early, is not fun. So we avoid it. We want our bosses to like us, so we flatter. We call it polishing the apple. God calls it a lie. We want people to admire us, so we exaggerate. We call it stretching the truth. God calls it a lie. We want people to respect us, so we live in houses we can't afford and charge bills we can't pay. We call it the American way. God calls it living a lie."

7. Let me ask the question I asked before in a different way. Are you "living a lie" in some way, or doing things similar to what Max talks about in the paragraph above? How can honesty sometimes bring consequences we don't like or make us uncomfortable?

8. Are you seeking recognition in some area of your life? Where should you turn for recognition and affirmation? (How do you balance this with the concept of “getting ahead” at work?) How does Matthew 23:12 tie in?

These questions are hard, aren't they?? Sapphira, why, oh why, did you do this? Were you afraid of coming against your husband? Were you simply just greedy and thought you could get away with it? Did you have a deep-seated need for love and recognition and it drove you to this? We will never know those answers, but I'm glad it's not too late for us to examine our own hearts and motives. I know I have insecurities and a deep-seated need for love and at times, it has caused me to make wrong decisions. Oh Lord, help us to turn to You alone for our affirmation!

Fourth Day

Continue to work on your memory verse! Maybe your leader will give you a sticker! 😊

1. Please read Acts 5:1-11 again. Yes, there are still more lessons to learn from our lady. We discussed earlier why her judgment seemed so severe. God desired them to see the truth about sin and its consequences. Let's talk about complacency for a minute. What are your thoughts on complacency regarding sin within the church today? Do you see it?
2. Why is complacency toward sin so dangerous?
3. It sure seems that God is tolerating hypocrisy and deceit at times. Why do you think? Is He? What does Ephesians 5:13, Jeremiah 17:10 about this?

4. The word “complacency” means “a feeling of contented self-satisfaction, especially when unaware of upcoming trouble.” It’s a feeling of smug or uncritical satisfaction with oneself or one’s achievements. Have you become complacent toward any sin in your life?

5. If you are a parent, have you become complacent toward sin in the lives of your children, failing to discipline or correct? Why is this dangerous?

6. How does living a complacent life destroy or taint our witness for Christ?

7. It’s been said that “The tragedy of the second lie is that it is always easier to tell than the first.” Do you think this is true? Can you think of a time when this was true for you, personally?

So often we think others will dislike us if they know who we “really are.” Once, years ago, I was getting to know a new lady from our church. I don’t remember the reason I called her, but when I did, she was cordial, sweet, and had answers to whatever it was I was asking. But the next phone call is what I really remember. She called right back and was crying. Basically, she told me that she had “pretended” that everything was ok, that her kids were great, and she had everything under control, when in actuality, her kids were literally screaming and freaking out, she and her husband had just gotten in a fight, and she was a mess. She asked for my forgiveness for “being a hypocrite and pretending.” You know what? That woman became one of my best friends. That call sealed the deal. Her honesty didn’t put me off or make me angry at her, it actually drew me to her. I figured this was the kind of friend I could trust with my own issues and be open and honest with. All this to say, the enemy loves to lie and tell us to “be” someone we’re not and to pretend to be something we’re not. Don’t fall for it ladies, we saw what happened to Sapphira!

8. How does honesty create vulnerability? How vulnerable do you make yourself with your friends?

9. Read Ephesians 4:20-32, which includes your memory verse. Paul tells us to “put off” and “put on.” How can this rid us of deceit and hypocrisy?

We can always deceive people, but we can never deceive God. We don't ever have to hide our true selves from Him, He loves us unconditionally. That doesn't mean He looks the other way when we sin, but when we acknowledge our need for Him and honestly accept we are sinners and in need of forgiveness and grace, we can honor Him in our hearts! 1 Samuel 16:7 tells us that “The Lord does not look at things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Praise God for that!

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory!

1. Read Exodus 20:3-5, 34:14, Deuteronomy 4:24, and Matthew 22:37-38. Why is God called a “jealous” God? What does that mean?

2. How do you think that attribute of God plays into the story of Ananias and Sapphira?

3. We know that God is a jealous God. When can jealousy be a good thing, when is it bad?

9. Max gives us three ways to avoid hypocrisy in our lives and take it as seriously as God does. Let's see if we can put these into practice.
 - a. Don't expect credit for good deeds. (How can we do this?)

 - b. Give financial gifts in secret. "Money stirs the phony in us." Read Matthew 6:3. Are you good at this or do you like to be seen?

 - c. Don't fake spirituality. Read Matthew 23:26. What does it say about this?

10. What is the most important lesson you learned from sinful Sapphira?

After we read this story, we find ourselves happy that God still doesn't strike people dead for lying. Again, Max answers this so well. He writes, "I'm not so sure He doesn't. It seems to me that the wages of deceit is still death. Perhaps this is not the death of the body. But it could lead to the death of a marriage, for falsehoods are termites in the trunk of the family tree. Or the death of a conscience, for the tragedy of the second lie is that it's always easier to tell than the first. Or the death of a career. Just ask the student who got booted out for cheating or the employee who got fired for embezzlement. Or the death of one's faith. The language of faith and the language of falsehood have two different vocabularies. We could also list the deaths of intimacy, trust, peace, credibility, and self-respect. But perhaps the most tragic death that occurs from deceit is our witness. The courts won't listen to the testimony of a perjured witness. Neither will the world. Do we think our coworkers will believe our words about Jesus when they can't even believe our words about how we handled our expense account? Even more significantly, do we think God will use us as witnesses if we won't tell the truth?"