

14. The Church Had to Deal with Sin

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how the people in the early church served one another in love. They were concerned to meet the needs of those Christians who lacked. However, there were also a few who saw this meeting of needs as an opportunity to get others to talk about their giving. We will meet one such couple in our topic today, and will see how the early church chose to deal with this sin.

In Acts 5:1-4, we read, “But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. 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. 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.’” In the last topic, we saw that Barnabas was commended for sharing with those who had needs. Here, we see that Ananias and Sapphira thought that this would be a good way to get recognition from the other Christians.

As a result, this couple also sold a possession. They agreed together that they would keep part of the money and tell the leaders of the church that they were giving the whole amount that they received from the sale of the possession. Many of the early believers had done a similar thing. Acts 2:44-45 says, “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.” Here, we see that many of the early believers had sold certain possessions to help meet the needs of other believers.

The difference with Ananias and Sapphira from the rest of these believers was the fact that they had decided to try and deceive others by making them think that they had given the entire amount from the sale of their possession. Since this was not required giving, they had the right to give none, to give part or to give all of the money that they received. However, they chose to lie to the church by saying that they were giving the entire amount and their lie was the sin that they were committing. Colossians 3:9 says, “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds.” Here, we see that we are not to lie to one another.

However, Peter recognized that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was actually against the Holy Spirit. That is why Acts 5:3-4 says, “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.’” Here, Peter makes it clear that their sin was to choose to lie to the Holy Spirit. The money belonged to them. They had the right to do with the money as they chose. However, the sin was the fact that they chose to lie to the Holy Spirit. Instead of being led by the Holy Spirit, this couple chose to be led by Satan.

God gave a warning in the early chapters of Genesis when He said in Genesis 6:3, “And the Lord said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one

hundred and twenty years.” In the Old Testament, we see that people recognized that their sin was against the Lord. Achan said in Joshua 7:20, “And Achan answered Joshua and said, ‘Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done.’” David said the same thing to the Lord in Psalm 51:4 when he said, “Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in Your sight--that You may be found just when You speak, *and* blameless when You judge.” Here, in Acts, Peter made it clear that Ananias and Sapphira had chosen to lie to the Holy Spirit and that is why the Lord brought judgment upon them.

That judgment of Ananias is described in Acts 5:5-6 where we read, “Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*.” We are reminded here that when we choose to sin that God will discipline us for that sin on the earth since Christians will not face future judgment. In 1 Corinthians 11:30-32 we read, “For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.” When a Christian chooses to rebel against God, he or she may experience the discipline of God on this earth so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

We see that this discipline of the Lord brought great fear upon the church and also upon those who were not placed their faith in Christ. In 1 Peter 4:17, we read, “For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” When God disciplines a Christian, even those who are not Christians realize that there is a future judgment waiting for those who totally reject Christ. Jude 22-23 says, “And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.” God calls us to reach out to those who do not know Christ with compassion. However, with some it is necessary for God to draw them to Himself through the fear of death. Hebrews 2:15 says, “And release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Christ died to set all people free from the bondage of the fear of death.

When Ananias died, the young men wrapped up his body in the way that the Jews wrapped the bodies of their dead. This form of preparation for burial is described in John 11:44 where we read, “And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Loose him, and let him go.’” Then, the young men took the body of Ananias out of the city and buried the body. Because of the fact that the Jews did not embalm the bodies of the dead, they usually buried them the same day that they died.

Acts 5:7-11 goes on to say, “Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 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.’ 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. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.” Here, we see that

Sapphira had not heard about the death of her husband.

It was about three hours later when Sapphira came to the place where the apostles were gathered. Peter asked her a few questions, because he wanted to find out if she had been in agreement with her husband in planning this deception. First, Peter asked Sapphira if they had sold the land for the price that Ananias said they had received for the land. Sapphira agreed that the amount Peter mentioned was the amount that they had received for the land. Then, Peter asked her a second question, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?” The word translated “test” here means *to challenge God by what is said*. Peter told Sapphira that she and Ananias had agreed together to challenge the Spirit of God by their lie. They thought they could hide their lie and make themselves look good to people, but they could not hide that lie from God. Then, Peter told Sapphira what had happened to her husband and said that the same thing was going to happen to her at that very moment. Peter told her that the young men who had buried her husband were waiting at the door to carry her body out and bury it. Sapphira immediately fell down to the ground and breathed her last. In this particular case, we see that the judgment of God of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira happened immediately. Galatians 6:7 says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” God will not be mocked. As 1 Corinthians 11:30 says, “For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep.” Defiant sin against God by a Christian can lead to physical death. Then, the same young men that had buried Ananias came and took the body of Sapphira and buried her by her husband.

The death of Ananias and Sapphira brought great fear both on the church and also on those who were not Christians when they heard about the death of this couple. The word translated “fear” means *that which causes terror or causes us to be afraid*. The word is translated “terror” in 2 Corinthians 5:11 where we read, “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.” The word is translated three times by the word “fear” in 1 John 4:18 where we read, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” When we are walking in disobedience to the Lord, we will experience fear of discipline. When we are walking in the love of the Lord, we will have a godly fear or reverence for God.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to walk in the love of the Lord moment by moment. Then, they will not have to fear the discipline of the Lord. Instead, they can enjoy the peace that we experience in our lives when we walk with the Lord and have a godly reverence for Him. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to walk in the love of the Lord.