

“A SINFUL SYMPHONY”

Acts 5:1-11

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INTRODUCTION

Do we see this kind of approach in the early church? What does Acts 5 teach us about the “draw” of the early church toward the unsaved world around them? One thing we notice at the end of this account: “*Great fear came upon . . . all who heard of these things.*” The early church was interested in **PURITY. God is interested in the purity of His people.**

God has, does, and will judge sin—ESPECIALLY IN HIS OWN PEOPLE.

Now, before we look at the passage in more detail, let us notice the importance of this story to the early church. Persecution by the world the church can handle; internal sin will ruin the church!

As we noted: **God has, does, and will judge sin.** In this passage we note: *deceitful dedication (1-2); divine detection (3-4, 7-9), righteous retribution (5a, 6, 10), and reverential respect (5b, 11).*

I. DECEITFUL DEDICATION (1-2)

A. Who were they?

- Ananias=Hananiah (cf. Dan. 1:6)—“Yahweh is gracious.”
- Sapphira=“beautiful”

B. What was their Sin?

1. Fraud—“they kept back part” (this is “purloining” an act Paul condemns in Titus 2:10 and connects with the church keeping a *good reputation* with the world and providing a *beautiful adorning* for the doctrine of the church.)
2. Greed: “Kept *for himself*” (compare others in Acts: Simon Magus (8); Elymus (13), Philippian masters of the servant girl (16), and the Ephesian silversmiths (19).)
3. Pride: “laid it at the apostles’ feet”—desire for reputation among believers. He wanted reputation like Barnabas. **HE STARTED THE “ANANIAS CLUB”!**
4. Hypocrisy: The sin of the Pharisees was entering the church!

C. Why was their sin so bad?

1. Conspiracy: His sin had the “full knowledge” of his wife (v. 2) This was a deliberate and aggravated offense.
2. Symphony of sin: v. 9—“sound together”. **This unity is so much different from that of**

4:32ff. They have oneness of soul—but for SIN!

3. Lie to the Holy Spirit (vv. 3-4)

- They lied in action and in word.
- They lied to God—note that lying to the HS is to lie to God—He is God! He is also a Person and is offended by lying.
- The Spirit is HOLY—and He is the Spirit of **Truth**.
- The Spirit had created and maintained the Church.
- He was empowering the church.
- The act of dedication of Ananias and Sapphira was directed toward God.
- To lie to God’s men doing God’s work is to lie to God!

4. A test of the Holy Spirit (9)

- This was like a challenge to Him.
- Could He really know?
- Would He really punish?
- How far can the believer really go without God taking action?
- Can God live up to His reputation?
- Compare Numbers 15:30-31—a high handed sin; vv. 32ff—a man gathering wood on the Sabbath.

Yes, their dedication was deceitful, but they did not fool the Holy Spirit, or even His apostles; God detected what they had done.

II. DIVINE DETECTION (3-4; 7-9)

A. Supernatural Revelation to Peter

B. Source of Sin—the “heart” (vv. 3, 4). Their heart was “filled”—controlled, no room for other influences. Cf. Judas: Jn. 8:44; 13:2, 27.

C. Satanic Influence—He is the “adversary” of believers (job 1-2; Rev. 12:10). This explains why church members can cause problems for the church!

D. Self-Motivation

- The “why” and “how is it” in vv. 3, 9 implies their power to resist Satan’s influence. Notice how this interrogation resembles that by God in the Garden of Eden.
- They were not obligated to give the property to God (the church). The property was under their control both before and after its sale by them. No one forced them to sell it, nor to give any of it to the church.
- Ananias literally “placed this deed” in his heart (v. 4).
- They were responsible for the lying (v. 4).

But, the Lord did not stop with Detection of their sinful behavior, He also brought about Righteous Retribution—He punished them for their sins. “Be sure, your sin will find you out.”

III. RIGHTEOUS RETRIBUTION (5a, 6, 10)

- A. Substance: Death—literally, “breathed out the soul”
1. Means: God slew them. This was not sudden shock or an overwhelming sense of guilt. Notice that Peter even foretold Sapphira that she was about to die!
 2. Immediacy: “As he heard” (v. 5); “Immediately” (v. 10)
 3. Irremediable: There was no second chance for either person (cf. v. 8 where Sapphira could have admitted the truth).
- B. Simon’s (Peter’s) Involvement
1. This is not an example of a taboo or the practice of voodoo! He did not even pronounce the death penalty to Ananias.
 2. Note Peter’s harsh language—He spoke in the spirit of Elijah who called down fire from Heaven. *But, Peter did not cause their deaths; he did not call down judgment.*
 3. Sapphira was not notified about her husband’s death; she came about 3 hours later. What was she doing?
 - She was involved too
 - Peter did not want some “false repentance” from her.
 - She did not deserve any special consideration.
 - **This was divine judgment.**
 4. Peter foretold Sapphira’s Fate (v. 9)
Note the drama: Footsteps at the door—ready to carry you out also.
 5. Would Jesus act the way Peter did? {YES! Cf. Pharisees, cleansing of temple; curse on cities. **Liberals have only a selective memory of Jesus.**
- C. Severity of the Action—Why?
1. Because of the seriousness of the sin.
 2. Because of the reality of the Holy Spirit and His working in the early Church.
 3. Because these people were the temples of the Holy Spirit (cf. I Cor. 3:16-17)
 4. Because the early church could have been ruined by such behavior.
 5. Because Jesus also took sin seriously during His earthly ministry—cf. harsh condemnation of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees; these people also desired reputation.
 6. Because others needed to be warned.
- D. Speedy Burial
- “Young men”—They were not official buriers, nor were they deacons.
 - “Covered him up” (v. 6—“wound him up”)
 - Carried him and her out.
 - Buried them both.
 - Prompt action for sanitary purposes.
 - Prompt action to avoid defilement.
 - Prompt action due to the divine judgment.

- They were “face to face” (“beside her husband”) in their death as in their conspiracy.
- E. Security of Ananias and Sapphira—were they Believers?
 Compare I Cor. 11:30; James 5:20; I Jn. 5:16-17: Judicial death for believers
 Note I Tim. 2:9—The Lord knows those who are His.

The Lord’s Righteous Retribution was not in vain; the result was a Reverential Respect among those who both saw and heard about what had happened.

IV. REVERENTIAL RESPECT (5b, 11) {“Great Fear”}

- A. Those present who heard and saw (5b).
- B. The Entire Church (11a)
- C. All who learned of these events (11b)

Generally, the world today does not have Awe and Respect toward the churches—more often it has contempt. **Those who name the name of Christ have often brought reproach upon the name of the Lord by their compromising, inconsistent, and worldly behavior.** Isn’t it time that we do something about our testimony before the world?

CONCLUSION

As the result of the Spirit’s action here:

- Ananias and Sapphira were better off—they committed no more wickedness.
- People learn about the importance of truth and integrity from this object lesson.
- God’s attitude toward sin was clarified.
- Purity in the Church was maintained.
- The common fund for the needy was not abused.

GOD HAS, DOES, AND WILL JUDGE SIN!

If sin is not dealt with:

- He holds back divine blessing.
- The Spirit is Grieved.
- Judgment will fall.

God’s holiness cannot be compromised!

Behold: the feet are at the door! Listen, can you hear them? (James 5:9)

You had better get things right now!