

014 - Acts 4:36-5:16 - Barnabas, Ananias, and Sapphira
originally preached GRBC 2012-03-05; revisited GRBC 2019-04-07

INTRODUCTION

In reading through the book of Acts, it's not long before we are introduced to the amazingly devout Christian named Joses, so gifted by the Lord in devotion to the church that he even sold land and brought the money for the use of the church, and the apostles called him Barnabas, "Son of Consolation" or "Son of Encouragement."

But no sooner have we read of Barnabas, and rejoiced in amazement at God's work in him to make him like that, we turn the page and come to the strange case of Ananias and Sapphira, the man and wife whom the Lord struck dead in the church in Jerusalem.

Years ago I learned to make an observation about these people who were in that original church in Jerusalem. I bring that observation to you today, hoping it will be of good help to you individually, and to the whole church, because, of course, we face the same temptations today that the people of that first church faced. As the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, we fervently desire to follow him as Barnabas did, not to fall into sin as Ananias and Sapphira did.

Here, then, is the observation we can consider today:

When you see people who are devoted to Jesus Christ and His church, you may have to deal with temptation merely to pretend that you are just as devoted. The history of Barnabas, Ananias, and Sapphira provides you insight from the Lord by which to resist such temptation.

TEXT

Acts 4:36-5:16

BODY

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I. You see people who are devoted to Christ and His church (4:36-37)

A. OF COURSE there are people truly devoted to Christ

1. God demonstrated His own love for us in this: when we were still sinners, Christ died for us!
2. the salvation from wrath that Christ has brought us causes us to be devoted to Him
3. we want to act out that devotion in obedience to Christ

B. OF COURSE there are people truly devoted to Christ's church

1. it is His church, and so we love it
2. it is His temple, His very body; so if we love Him, we love His church

C. So you see people devoted to Christ and to the church

1. they do things that are very loving and self-sacrificing (37)
 - a. in this case Barnabas encouraged the brothers, and sold a field and donated all the money; others were doing similar things
 - b. in our times, people show devotion to Christ's church in many ways
2. they are recognized by the leadership (36)
 - a. this is right, although leaders must be cautious here
1 Corinthians 16:17-18 I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied. (18) For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

II. You are tempted to pretend their devotion to Christ and His church

A. Everyone likes to have a good reputation, to be spoken well of

B. Having a good reputation in the church is something wholesome, something to be desired

C. Such a good reputation is legitimately earned by true self-denial, real sacrificial service that comes from a heart full of love for Jesus Christ who has saved you

D. But, being sinners, you often are tempted to gain this good reputation by the shortcut of deceit

EXCURSUS

This is one of the devil's main tricks. He sets before you something that God has created to be good. But God has ordained one and only one way lawfully to attain that good, one way only that such good can be had in righteousness. The devil points men's attention to the good, but also to a shortcut, a different path to getting that good than the one acceptable path God has ordained.

e.g. The wonderful intimacy between a husband and wife. It is very good. God has ordained one way and only one way to get it:

- you work to be able to provide for a wife and children
- you propose marriage
- you wait for the wedding day
- you get married, vowing exclusive love for just that one person until death
- then you get to enjoy the wonderful intimacy God created for a man and woman

One of the devil's main tricks is to hold out that intimacy between man and woman, which God created, but point out that you could get it by shortcut. Just leave out any of those steps, or all of them. Just skip to the end.

But as with all rebellion against God, the good you think you are getting by following the devil's shortcuts ends up being much less good than you thought it would be. It may taste something like the good thing God created for us to enjoy, but you find that there is a bitter aftertaste, and a sickening effect on your whole life that is the poison of the serpent's deceit. In many cases, the poison is downright deadly.

So, do not fall for that trick of the devil. Seek the good things that God has created for us to enjoy, but only in the way that He has ordained for us to get them.

1. pretending to what the leading Christians are doing, but not really doing it
 - a. this is what Ananias and Sapphira were doing
 - b. there are many ways of doing this, giving the impression that you are doing something, when you are not doing it; or giving the impression that you are doing something to a high degree, when really you are only doing it to a low degree
 - c. the area raised here is that of giving money into the church's offering
 - this is one where many people go astray
 - they give the impression they are generous Christians
 - but they actually do not give much if any money into the church's offering

2. actually doing what the leading Christians are doing, but being motivated not by love, but by desire for recognition
 - a. we are a somewhat radical group here, and as such I think we are very susceptible to this
 - i. maybe I observe the Sabbath more scrupulously than you do, and I do it so that I can be seen as the most holy
 - ii. maybe I abstain from TV, internet, movies, etc., but I do it so I can be seen as the most holy
 - b. again, the area that snagged Ananias and Sapphira was giving money
 - i. many times people give money in the church's offering
 - ii. but it is not out of love; they desire to be seen as a leading member of the church; they desire to be taken seriously in the church, so they give money

III. To resist that temptation, you must understand what is going on at such times

- A. You think you are acting independently, but really you are in league with Satan
 1. Satan is seeking entry, so as to fill your heart (3)
 2. If you allow it, you are then doing his bidding (4)
 3. but you are still culpable; that is, you are still to blame
- B. You think you are lying to men, but really you are lying to God's Holy Spirit (3,4)
 1. when you try to deceive men, you may well get away with it in their eyes
 2. but when you lie to men, you really are lying to God; this is most obvious when you lie to the people of Christ's church, especially those acting on behalf of the church officially
 - a. do you think He won't find out?
 - b. do you think He won't hold you accountable for it?
 - c. do you think there will be no consequences?
 - d. do you really think yourself secure in Christ if this is how you live?

IV. To resist that temptation, you must consider the consequences of such actions

A. God will expose your hypocrisy sooner or later

1. in some cases, as here and as with Achan, it is sooner
2. in other cases, it is later in life
3. in other cases, it does not come out until the final judgment
4. but God will expose your hypocrisy sooner or later

B. Eventually, your name will become a byword in the church

1. think of how their names sound to us
 - a. we name our girls Ruth, Abigail, Mary---but not Sapphira
 - b. we name our boys Aaron, Andrew, even Adam---but not Achan
2. just think of that happening to your name
 - a. you deceive the church as to your devotion
 - b. your deception is exposed
 - c. your names become synonymous with hypocrisy

C. The church will have to prosper in spite of you rather than because of you

1. God caused this church in Jerusalem to flourish after this
2. but it wasn't because of what Ananias and Sapphira did, but in spite of it

D. You will bring people you love down with you (10); the bible teaches this repeatedly

1. When Ham dishonored his father, his son Canaan was cursed
2. When Abram lied to the king, his son Isaac learned to do the same
3. When Aaron worshiped in ways God had not commanded, his sons did the same, and died a fiery death
4. When Achan sinned, his whole family was killed with him
5. When David committed adultery and murder, his sons did the same, and were killed as a result
6. Here, when Ananias sinned, he took his wife with him, and she died as he did
7. Is this what you want for your loved ones? See them there?

V. If you are guilty of this kind of falsehood, repent of this sin and be forgiven in Jesus Christ

A. Admit to God that this is what you have been doing; turn from it

B. Seek His forgiveness in the name of Jesus Christ

C. Leave the deception

D. Strive for the real thing

1. be known as Barnabas by actually doing as Barnabas did out of love for Jesus Christ

CONCLUSION

Psalm 139:23-24 KJV

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: (24) And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Consider these two sayings together:

“why has Satan filled your heart to lie”

“Why have you conceived this thing in your heart?”

What was the sin?

1. Allowing Satan an opening to fill your heart
2. Conceiving this thing in your heart
3. Lying to the Holy Spirit
4. Testing the Holy Spirit

“I know this is wrong, but I don’t think God will do anything about it, so I don’t care.”
which reveals that you don’t obey out of love but out of fear of getting caught

JRY

To whatever degree we are NOT like A and S, we owe in part to God’s providing this event and record of it to the church at the beginning.

The same accountability will come on everyone. This is just one instance where it came out in this life, publicly.

Pugh:

The word for “kept back” is the same word used in the LXX for Achan’s action.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Luke 12:1-3 In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. (2) For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. (3) Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.

Call to Worship: Psalm 139:14

Scripture Reading: Joshua 6:17-19; 7:1-26

Sermon: Barnabas, Ananias, and Sapphira Acts 4:36-5:16

Benediction: 1 John 1:6-7

Prelude Camille Piano, Anna Clarinet, Jimmy Djembe, Dale Guitar

T 707 Pass Me Not

T 708 Moment By Moment

G 176 'Tis Such a Mystery, Father, Camille piano, Anna Clarinet or sing,

T 34 Psalm 139, Anna Piano, Camille Flute,

G 190 When I Survey The Wondrous Cross, Anna Piano, Camille Sing

G 202 - My Jesus, Fair, Camille Piano, Anna Clarinet or Sing