

“1 ¶ But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, 2 And kept back *part* of the price, his wife also being privy *to it*, and brought a certain part, and laid *it* at the apostles’ feet. 3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land? 4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. 5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. 6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried *him* out, and buried *him*. 7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. 8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. 9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband *are* at the door, and shall carry thee out. 10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying *her* forth, buried *her* by her husband. 11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. 12 ¶ And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch. 13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.” (Ac 5:1-13)

Introduction: These were extraordinary days in the beginning of the church. Just as in those last days in Egypt, when God’s covenant people were being manifested on the earth as a people, a royal priesthood, and a people marked out to be a special people for the Lord, there were great signs and wonder that we must not expect to be repeated over and over again. We do not expect to see a Red Sea crossing, tables of stone given from a holy mountain, fiery serpents in the wilderness or all the other things that were given from Mt. Sinai to establish that covenant and to verify the message of Moses and the Prophets, so we do not expect to see great signs and wonders now that the revelation of God in Scripture has been finished and the New Covenant in the blood of Christ has been established.

There are several things I want to say this morning concerning this remarkable story of Ananias and Sapphira. I. I would speak of the Simplicity of Truth; II. I would speak of the Duplicity of Deceit; III Felicity of the Bond of Love. SIMPLICITY; DUPLICITY; FELICITY.

I. The Simplicity of Truth.

A. I use the word Simplicity in the same sense as we use it when we speak of God.

1. There is a unity to truth; it cannot be divided up into parts that stand alone. There are no contradictions in truth.
2. Scripture cannot be broken, Jesus said. During all His ministry, He was careful to show that His ministry and His work did not contradict what was revealed by Moses and the Prophets. “Search the Scriptures,” He said, “for in them ye think ye have eternal life, but they are they which testify of me.”
3. We have seen that from the day the Holy Spirit was given, every sermon that was preached by Peter in those days, pointed back to the prophets that prophesied of the time when God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh.
4. So we should not expect to see the signs and wonders of the early days of the church repeated, because we have something better than that: 1 Peter 1:19ff
19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. {in old time: or, at any time}

1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

B. So this swift and sure chastisement came upon Ananias and Sapphira to establish a very important truth that must lie at the very heart of the Christian Faith.

1. Truth is very important and reflects the very Unity and Simplicity of God Himself. Attacks upon the truth are an attack upon God Himself.
2. It is true that there were signs and wonders in the days of some of the prophets, notably Elijah and Elisha, but when the Old Testament Scriptures were finished, so did the signs and wonders. Not even John the Baptist, the greatest of the Old Covenant prophets, performed miracles, for he wrote no scripture but pointed to Christ, the Lamb of God, who would establish the New Testament in His blood and when the prophets and apostles of this New Testament had finished their work, then miracles again ceased until they were revived in deceitful and lying ways to attempt to establish the authority of false churches with false messages.

C. By his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ, Peter could not allow such hypocrisy to take root in the church in that very early age.

1. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not in holding back some of the money that they received from the sale of the land they sold; the sin was in the lie.
2. By direct revelation, we presume, Peter knew of the lie and rebuked them for it, and they were both held personally responsible for it.
 - a. The land was theirs, they had personal ownership of it. This story completely refutes the economic heresy of collective ownership and shows that it was NOT practiced by the early church.
 - b. After it was sold, the money was still in the power of Ananias and Sapphira.
 - (1). It belonged to God, but that doesn't mean that it belonged to the Apostles.
 - (2). Ananias and Sapphira could have used the money according to the light God gave them, to do good for the glory of God as they saw fit.
 - (3). Tithes and offerings belong to God and are at the disposal of the church according to the government of that church; but persons and families and other institutions also have wealth given to them by God to be used for the glory of God.
 - (4). It is a sin to hold back from God anything that we have, for whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we are to do it by faith for the glory of God; but that does not mean that the church owns everything and has the right to command people in the use of their substance. This is a very important thing to know, especially in our day. Neither does the state own everything and have the right to command how it is to be used and controlled, for that deprives God and His people of their right, given to them by God.
 - c. But it is a very great sin to lie to the Holy Spirit.

- (1). Theirs was a very great hypocrisy: they pretended to do more than they did. They wanted to adorn themselves with the feathers of another bird. They puffed themselves up.
- (2). And that brings us to our second point:

II. The Duplicity of Deceit.

A. The sin was the sin of Duplicity and False Pretenses.

1. Justis, or Barnabas, had just sold land and gave all the money to the work of the church; Ananias and Sapphira wanted a part of the fame of Justis, and lied in order to gain it. They were cheats and hypocrites. They did not understand the sacrifice of Justis and thought he was doing it for earthly credit and glory and wanted part of the same. They wanted to take credit for what they did not do.
2. False pretense was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. It is the same sin that students use when they cheat on assignments or examination; when politicians take credit for things they did not do; when ministers plagiarize their sermons; etc. For bankers who falsify securities and defraud investors of their money, for businesses that use false weights and measures, for salesmen who misrepresent their products, for governments who inflate their currency, putting base metal in the coins and flooding the world with paper money.
 - (1). It is the sin of false prophets who misrepresent the gospel and the nature of God. Who debase the fine gold of the gospel by mixing it with the lead of their own opinions and their own ideas. Those who pretend spiritual experience that they have not had; who pretend a devotion like the Pharisees who stood on the corners of the street and made long prayers. False pretenses are everywhere.
 - (2). This is the reason we are told not to judge according to appearance, but to judge righteously;
 - (a). We are to have correct weights and measures, not only in our business, but in our evaluations of ourselves and others who pretend the faith.
 - (b). Evil puts on many a mask and pretends many things; Satan himself comes as an angel of light and his ministers are ministers of righteousness. We are commanded to have discernment; to test those who say they a ministers and separate the wheat from the chaff.
 - (3). Years ago, a wise instructor gave a class of new teachers some very wise instructions: "It is not what you expect; it is what you inspect." You have to examine and see where students have followed the assignments and done the work in a satisfactory way; mothers and fathers are not to leave their children to themselves to do as they please, but they must supervise and lead them in the way of truth and righteousness; a child left to himself will bring his mother to shame, the Scripture says. Children are born with deceit in their hearts; a wise mother and father, having considered the deceit in their own hearts learn to deal wisely with that in the hearts of their children.
 - (4). Do not become partakers of other men's sin. Peter could not accept the false pretense of Ananias, or he himself become guilty.

- (a). Isa 5:20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!
- (b). Or as Psalm 50:
 16 But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or *that* thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? 17 Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. 18 When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. 19 Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. 20 Thou sittest *and* speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. 21 These *things* hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether *such an one* as thyself: *but* I will reprove thee, and set *them* in order before thine eyes. 22 Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear *you* in pieces, and *there be* none to deliver. 23 Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth *his* conversation *aright* will I show the salvation of God." (Ps 50:16-23)

III. The Felicity of the Truth.

- A. False pretenses are like viruses that corrupt the whole body. They affect the nervous system, the strength, the coordination, the ability to fight off disease.
- B. Truth in the mouth, in the heart, in the life is health to the bones and healing to the body. Pain is sometimes necessary. I would rather have a doctor who hurts me and heals the disease rather than one who soothes the pain and leaves the disease. It is good to have both, but one is better than the other.
- C. Ephesians 4: 25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another.
1. Just before, Paul wrote that we are not to act like the rest of the world, who are strangers from God because of their ignorance and blindness.
 2. We have not learned from Christ to live like this, but we have learned the truth in Jesus.
 3. So we are to put off the old way of life and be renewed in our minds, and put on the new man.
 4. Wherefore; quit lying to each other: why? Because we are members of each other.

The whole body becomes sick and weak because of liars like Ananias and Sapphira; and the Lord is giving us warning from the very beginning of the church of the importance of truth reigning in the inner man for the glory of God and that truth and love move freely among us for the glory of God and the wellbeing of the church.

Application: The devil is often in the details.

1. It was Peter, as an apostle of the Lord that laid bare the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira. It is not the role of every member of the church to nose around and try to find evil to expose.
2. Most deceit will not be revealed until the day of judgment, and we must be content with that.

3. It is very difficult to deal with the deceit and duplicity of others, Some deceivers are very good at it; The people of God must generally trust the Lord to protect them and the work of the church from people like Ananias and Sapphira, and the Lord does not give us tools to search out the hearts and souls of men except in the faithful preaching of the word of God, which does discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.

4. When God allows such things to be known, then the church must deal with them according to the instructions of the Lord, but at all times we must believe that the Lord is our fortress and our very high tower, our rock and defender against all the deceit and duplicity of men.

5. Even in these things, the Lord has His way and accomplishes His good purpose. The church fulfills its work even though its way is through the crooked places and the thorny paths. God does not expose and judge every Ananias and Sapphira in this world, but uses them to test the church and drive believers to trust in Christ and to walk in faith. Amen and Amen.

6. Finally: Proverbs 3:

- 1 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:
- 2 For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.
- 3 Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:
- 4 So shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man.
- 5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.
- 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.
- 7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.
- 8 It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.