

The Ananias and Sapphira Episode, Redux

We've already discussed this text in a previous lesson. There's something else in this passage, though, that we need to understand, because it's important to us. What those two did was conspire to deceive the church. It was clearly an act of fraud. They had witnessed Barnabbas, out of love and in the Spirit, making a supreme sacrifice, and they wanted to make it look like they were also so spiritual that they did the same. Except that they weren't in the Spirit. They were in Satan. They were really only sacrificing a small part. And it wasn't selfless; rather, it was to exalt themselves. They sought the praise and honor of men, rather than what comes from God.

So Peter states, "You lied to the Holy Spirit." What? They lied to the believers gathered together there, in assembly. Yet they lied to God! It's not just that God in heaven saw and overheard what was happening. This Scripture is saying that God so indwells the assembly of believers that to deceive believers is to deceive God Himself. In other words, this passage is similar to and parallels Jesus' statement at Saul's conversion on the Damascus road, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Jesus there intimately identified with the believers, they are a unity. In the Ananias and Sapphira episode, the Holy Spirit is intimately identifying with the believers, with the Church.

In the parable of the wheat and tares (or weeds), the farmer initially sows wheat in his field. It's a pure field of wheat. Subsequently, the devil comes along and sows weeds. The weeds look like wheat, but they aren't; they're counterfeit. They don't bear fruit. So, at first the Church is pure. Jesus won't allow phonies or deceivers in His church. They will come later.

Ananias and Sapphira didn't lose their salvation. They lost the privilege of participating in this new work of God, the spread of the Gospel. They were believers, justified by the Person and work of Jesus, but out of discipline it was necessary that they forfeit intended blessings. In the same way, David was forgiven of his ghastly sins with Bathsheba and her husband, yet he suffered horrible discipline as a consequence. We miss this! To have forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life in heaven does not preclude God from disciplining us. We may be justified, that is, have the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and we may be adopted and sealed and all that attends salvation, yet still suffer loss if we fail to actually live out righteousness. So we need to know what righteous living is, and then live it. Why? Because God isn't merely watching; He is in us. He is present in our lives. Later in time, the Apostle Paul will write to the believers at Corinth, "Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you?" We must live accordingly.

The Church is the Person of Christ continuing His work throughout all the world during this interim era until He returns. What work? Seeking and saving, sanctifying and serving. In other words, finding then preparing people for the coming Kingdom.

This episode is here as a warning to us. Not just to refrain from deceiving other believers, although that's certainly there, but to take seriously our calling. We're not immune from discipline. For all of us, the loss we suffer for lack of good works ("fruit") won't be experienced until the judgment seat of Christ, when it's too late for us to repent, although for some of us it may also be experienced in the here and now, as with Ananias and Sapphira. A majestic and ineffably holy God is in us. So we must – *must* – live accordingly.

Another lesson to glean from this passage is Satan's involvement. Evidently, the Church is a battleground over which spiritual being is expressed, Satan or the Holy Spirit. Let's be absolutely certain we know and live out a biblical worldview because, as we see here, Satan and his minions are able to influence believers to do evil – but we bear the responsibility and suffer the consequences for it.

Church as an audience of passive spectators is a Roman Catholic invention, thoughtlessly carried over into Protestantism. The Church biblically is a community of those who follow Jesus, who are united to Jesus in an intimate relationship. Jesus thus lives out His exalted, resurrected life all over earth in the lives of His followers. Holiness, obedience, trust, commitment, faithfulness, zeal, works of righteousness, all these and more are expected from those followers, from that community. Let's be sure that we're all we should be, doing all we should be doing, and that we're not offending the indwelling Spirit.