

ACTS 5:1-10

MEN WHOM GOD KILLED! LYING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT!

“A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.’ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

“After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.’ And she said, ‘Yes, for so much.’ But Peter said to her, ‘How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.’ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.”¹

If God killed every Christian who lied, the churches would be empty. I am not excusing lying, but I am acknowledging our fallibility. We know we are to be truthful in our speech and in our actions. However, we fail miserably to live up to what we know to be correct. Nevertheless, there is a point at which God does finally say, “Enough!” Knowing this to be true, Christians need to learn restraint. We need to hear the words of Jesus, who taught us, “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” [MATTHEW 5:37].

Fortunately, the Lord does not kill every individual who lies. There is, as you suspect, a caveat to be pronounced. Lying to the Holy Spirit invites immediate and severe judgement—and the more so when the lying revolves around idolatry. Idolatry? Where is the idolatry in this pericope? It is a legitimate question. Think of a few portions of the Word and the idolatry becomes apparent.

There are several verses that we should hold in mind as we prepare to study why God would kill this husband and his wife. In order to prepare ourselves, I invite you to join me in looking at two verses in the Letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossian congregation. “Put to death what belongs to your worldly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and **greed, which is idolatry**. Because of these, God’s wrath comes on the disobedient” [COLOSSIANS 3:5, 6 HCSB].

Again, consider what Paul has written in **EPHESIANS 5:3-7** as translated in the **NET BIBLE**. “Among you there must not be either sexual immorality, impurity of any kind, or greed, as these are not fitting for the saints. Neither should there be vulgar speech, foolish talk, or coarse jesting—all of which are out of character—but rather thanksgiving. For you can be confident of this one thing: that no person who is immoral, impure, **or greedy (such a person is an idolater)** has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

“Let nobody deceive you with empty words, for because of these things God’s wrath comes on the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not be partakers with them.”

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

This is the final passage to hold in mind as we prepare to engage in this study. “Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For *the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils*. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” [1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10].

Twice in the passages cited, the Apostle equated greed to idolatry. Similarly, in his First Letter to Timothy, the Apostle is adamant that “love of money” leads to spiritual disaster. Spiritual disaster is equated with ethical and moral deviation, which for the Christian leads to cessation of the Christ-life. In short, greed leads us to break fellowship with the Son of God.

What does all this business of greed have to do with lying to the Holy Spirit? Greed is idolatry! Idolatry is the establishment of some thing as being more greatly valued than relationship with Christ. Greed leads to self-deceit and destroying the relationship with the Father. When the Spirit prompted Doctor Luke to include this incident in the account of the New Beginnings Baptist Church of Jerusalem, He did so to serve as a warning against erecting an altar to another deity in the heart.

The account is similar to another incident that is recorded in the Old Testament. That story is recorded in the seventh chapter of the Book of Joshua. You perhaps recall the story of Achan. Israel had just won their first great battle in the Promised Land—the city of Jericho had fallen. The next chapter begins with the ominous words, “But the people of Israel broke faith” [JOSHUA 7:1a]. The divine account continues as the writer relates how Israel was defeated in a clash before a much smaller city. The people were devastated because they realised that they were in enemy territory and they had just lost a minor battle.

The LORD directed Joshua to begin an investigation to discover why God appears to have withdrawn His blessing. At last, God directs Joshua to the tribe of Judah, then to the clan of the Zerahites, and at last to the family of Achan. Joshua demands of Achan, “Give glory to the LORD God of Israel and give praise to Him. And tell me now what you have done” [JOSHUA 7:19]. Then, Achan confesses, “It is true. I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel in this way: I saw among the goods we seized a nice robe from Babylon, two hundred silver pieces, and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels. I wanted them, so I took them” [JOSHUA 7:20, 21a].

Until Achan’s sin was exposed and expunged, the nation was at risk. In a similar fashion, Ananias and Sapphira threatened the continued existence of the congregation because they had succumbed to the same idolatry that had seized Achan. If Peter had not exposed their sin, it had the potential to destroy the nascent work of God in Jerusalem. By including this particular incident in the account of the congregation in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit asks of each Christian, “Will you find your name written here? Is your life portrayed by this failure of a couple who attempted to lie to the Holy Spirit?” Let’s explore together what happened when the Lord refused to allow this couple to lie to Him.

THE INCIDENT — This incident continues the account begun in the previous chapter. The church was united in service before the Lord; the congregation was marked by enviable harmony. One man, in particular, was denoted for his generosity to the work of God. Motivated, perhaps, by his generosity toward the congregation, the Apostles gave him the name “Barnabas,” or “Son of Encouragement.” He had sold a field, and rather than profiting personally from the moneys he received, he brought the funds to be used as the Apostles saw fit.

The fifth chapter begins with the conjunction, “But...” This alerts the reader that what is about to be related continues the previous thought. We meet a man and his wife who appear to have been motivated by jealousy. They saw the praise that this Joseph received and they were jealous. Discussing the matter between themselves, they decided to sell a piece of property, keeping back some of the proceeds for themselves. The rest they would bring to the Apostles, intimating that this was the entire profit from the sale. They wanted the same praise Barnabas had received.

God was not impressed. Peter exposed Ananias’ heart as the heart of a liar. The worst part of his lie was that he was attempting to deceive the Spirit of God. God judged him quickly and harshly, and Ananias fell down dead.

About three hours later, Sapphira, unaware that her husband had died, came in, undoubtedly hoping to be praised for their generosity. Peter asked, “Tell me whether you [and your husband] sold the land for so much?” Her response likely revealed her eager expectation to be praised, “Yes, for so much.” However, Peter’s response must surely have shocked her when he responded, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” With that, she fell down before him and breathed her last. The young men carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

Let’s tease apart some truths that are immediately apparent from even a casual reading of this pericope. First, this couple was *driven by improper motives for their service*. In their mind, public recognition was more important than was recognition from God. Perhaps God will immediately recognise you for your service; but if not, He is still very much aware of what you have done and why you have performed your service.

Perhaps we need to hear the warning Jesus issued in the Sermon on the Mount. “Be careful not to display your righteousness merely to be seen by people. Otherwise you have no reward with your Father in heaven. Thus, whenever you do charitable giving, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in synagogues and on streets so that people will praise them. I tell you the truth, they have their reward. But when you do your giving, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your gift may be in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you” [MATTHEW 6:1-4].

No doubt pride lay behind their deceit, but the sin of *pride was compounded by greed*. As demonstrated in the Word, greed is equated with idolatry. The accumulation of possessions through fear of want, declares to the world about us that God is incapable of caring for us. Greed, when it has taken control of one’s life, is a declaration of rank infidelity.

Greed is idolatry because when an individual has been seized by greed, that one cannot be controlled by God; rather, self has taken control of that person’s life. The idolatry of that life is the vilest form of idolatry because it is nothing less than self-worship.

Finally, in the life of Ananias and Sapphira *pride and greed led to lying to God*. They first lied to themselves before they lied to God. Thus, Peter confronted Ananias, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God” [ACTS 5:3,4]. Later, the Apostle confronted Sapphira who was likewise enmeshed in sin’s deadly tentacles. “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out” [ACTS 5:9].

Sin is like that—one sin opens the door to yet another sin, which in turn exposes us to yet greater sin. Ultimately, our compounded sins bring swift and certain judgement from a holy God. Keep this thought in mind—throughout this passage, God is dealing with two believers! God was not judging unbelievers, though unbelievers shall surely be judged with an eternal judgement. What is before us is judgement pronounced on children of God who have crossed the boundaries of what God will tolerate. This is fulfilment of warnings provided in the Word!

As an example, recall the stern warning issued through the Apostle of Love. “If we see a Christian believer sinning (clearly, I’m not talking about those who make a practice of sin in a way that is ‘fatal,’ leading to eternal death), we ask for God’s help and he gladly gives it, gives life to the sinner whose sin is not fatal. There is such a thing as a fatal sin, and I’m not urging you to pray about that” [1 JOHN 5:16, THE MESSAGE].

In a similar vein, you will no doubt remember the words which James has written. “My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone turns him back, he should know that the one who turns a sinner back from his wandering path will save that person’s soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” [JAMES 5:19, 20 NET BIBLE].

Believers must not presume upon God’s grace, He will not overlook presumptuous sin. Attempting to deceive God leads to judgement. If we will judge ourselves, turning from all such attempts at deceit, we will find grace and mercy. If we refuse to turn from our own wickedness, judgement surely awaits the sinner.

This brief recitation of divine judgement allows us to keep the matter in perspective. Knowing what happened and why God acted so swiftly will permit us to formulate lessons for our benefit. These two early believers, a couple who were undoubtedly believers in the Risen Christ, were judged. Our God has included the account of their sin and of their death in this account of the early churches for our benefit.

ADMINISTRATION OF LIFE — Throughout this particular account are two overarching thoughts. Freedom and responsibility stand out in the account included in the Word. Believers are free in Christ. Paul declares in one of his earliest letters, “For freedom Christ has set us free” [GALATIANS 5:1]. Shortly, he will write, “You were called to freedom, brothers” [GALATIANS 5:13a]. Never forget that we are free in Christ. However, the Apostle quickly adds a cautionary warning when he writes, “Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” [GALATIANS 5:13b]. Freedom is always balanced against responsibility.

Think of *the freedom we enjoy in Christ*. All that I possess is because of the goodness and the grace of God. Paul asked the Corinthians, “What do you have that you did not receive” [1 CORINTHIANS 4:7]? Excellent question! Do you have a warm house? Do you drive a dependable vehicle? Did you have food to eat last evening? Was your appetite healthy so that you could enjoy the food that was prepared for your family? Then, it is a legitimate question, “What do you have that you did not receive?” The appropriate answer to that question is that I have nothing that I did not receive because of God’s goodness and kindness.

I cannot boast of my possessions since I received the strength and health necessary to earn the monies required to purchase them. I cannot boast of my intelligence; neither can I boast of my abilities. I had no input into who my parents would be; it was a roll of the genetic dice that determined who I would be and what I would possess in terms of strength, intelligence and co-ordination. These things were never mine to demand, though I may hone what was given me through my birth. None of us can boast of race or heritage since we had no input into the issue. None of us can boast of our skill or abilities, though we are responsible to hone them.

All that any of us possess was given by Another; behind that knowledge lies the hand of God. Thus, “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it” [1 CORINTHIANS 4:7]? John has taught those who will receive it, “A person cannot receive *even one thing* unless it is given him from heaven” [JOHN 3:27]. Though the context of this affirmation was the ministry he conducted as the Forerunner of the Messiah, the scope of the statement covers all of life.

David speaks of God’s oversight into who we will become when he writes in the Psalms.

“Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;
you formed me in my mother’s womb.
I thank you, High God—you’re breathtaking!
Body and soul, I am marvellously made!
I worship in adoration—what a creation!
You know me inside and out,
you know every bone in my body;
You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
how I was sculpted from nothing into something.
Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;
all the stages of my life were spread out before you,
The days of my life all prepared
before I’d even lived one day.”

[PSALM 139:13-16, THE MESSAGE]

Such knowledge is awe inspiring! We know and are convinced that God determines even the abilities *and disabilities* of those whom we in society call broken and flawed. There is purpose in each one whom God gives to us as a society. In our arrogance, we imagine that we can change what God has given through our puerile intervention. There was a nation that thought it could create a master race, a perfect society without flawed individuals. That nation imagined that through ridding itself of the flawed and the broken, but that nation was itself flawed—it destroyed itself, just as we shall destroy ourselves if we continue in our sinful imaginations.

Though unbelievers may dissent from acknowledging that God has given freely, determining even who they shall be, it does not change reality. All that the wicked think they enjoy is through the kindness and mercies of the Living God. In the Word, we are warned, “Do you presume on the riches of [God’s] kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance” [ROMANS 2:4]?

Jesus has taught us, “[God] makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” [MATTHEW 5:45]. Because this is true, dissent cannot change reality. If lost people will not acknowledge the truth, surely, we who name the Name of Christ will confess, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” [JAMES 1:17].

The amazing truth concerning what God has given is that I am free to utilise all that I have and all that I am as I determine. God does not compel me to choose how I shall invest my time, my efforts, my wealth or my talents. I am free, just as you are free. I am not suggesting that we have no guidelines to direct the investment of that over which we have oversight. Nevertheless, no one of us can say that God has made us automatons without capacity to choose, without ability to decide. God has given each of us freedom.

Offset against the freedom we enjoy is *responsibility to use our freedom wisely*. One day, each of us shall give an account to God for how we utilised all that was at our disposal. Recall that the Master provided parables concerning this truth. For instance, Jesus told a parable of an unjust manager who was about to be fired. Knowing that his employment was about to be terminated, this manager called in his master's debtors and began to arbitrarily adjust the debt of each one to a lower amount. Then, Jesus provided this commentary on the parable He had told, "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" [LUKE 16:10-13].

Jesus also spoke of a rich man who invested foolishly. You will perhaps remember the parable. "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" [LUKE 12:16-21].

These parables challenge us to remember that we are responsible for managing all we have received—wealth, abilities, time, person. One day, we must each give an account of our management. Consider the import of these words which the Master spoke to His disciples. "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more" [LUKE 12:42-48].

While Ananias and Sapphira were in possession of their earthly goods, they were free to dispose of anything as they pleased. Surely that is clear from Peter's words to Ananias, "While [the land] remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal" [ACTS 5:4]?

As believers in the Living God, we are not under compulsion to surrender anything that He has placed under our oversight. We have no command compelling us to rid ourselves of any possession or to employ our strength without considering our own needs. We are under no specific command concerning abilities or time; we have absolute freedom in pursuit of employment of life. Remember the words that Paul wrote and which have already been cited: "For freedom Christ has set us free" [GALATIANS 5:1].

However, having noted this truth, we must still deal with the matter of responsibility. Recall the words of the wise man:

“One gives freely, yet grows all the richer;
another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.
Whoever brings blessing will be enriched,
and one who waters will himself be watered.
The people curse him who holds back grain,
but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.”

[PROVERBS 11:24-26]

As a principle for guiding our decisions in this life, hear again the words that Paul wrote. “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life” [1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19].

PRESSURES FROM SOCIETY — Our society is not godly—it may be polite, but it is not godly. Modern societies make much of being secular. There is no room for God or for godliness in contemporary society. Religion is fine, so long as it is kept within the four walls of the church. It was much the same in the days in which the first churches were established.

Ananias was a Jew; he was no doubt imbued with the teachings of Jewish leaders. Among the Jewish leaders were the Sadducees, a group that were unquestionably secular. Sadducees were materialists; they had no room for God, other than a perfunctory acknowledgement of their ancient roots. They were much like modern society in this respect. Unfortunately, their attitude had infected much of society, even the religiously conservative Pharisees. In the estimate of the political leaders of that day, wealth spoke of power; and the powerful were also wealthy. Life consisted of gaining wealth so they could gain more power so they could gain more wealth. Things haven’t changed much in the ensuing two millennia.

One has to ask whether an individual can aspire to leadership as a politician without considerable wealth at her or his disposal. We just watched an election in the United States, and the expenditures to secure the nomination for either major party was obscene. Then, to run for election, the cost exceeded all expectations. The final price tag for the election appears to have exceeded 6.8 billion dollars!² That is more than what consumers spend on cereal (\$6 billion), pet grooming (\$5.4 billion) and legal marijuana (\$5.4 billion). That is nearly the same amount spent by all Christian groups on missionary outreach each year! Actually, Christians spend \$8 billion per year going to conferences to talk about missions, which is more than is actually spent on missionary work itself!³ Then, of this amount, about one percent goes to unreached people groups!⁴ Most is spent internally!

² Jonathan Berr, “Election 2016’s price tag: \$6.8 billion,” cbsnews.com, November 8, 2016, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/election-2016s-price-tag-6-8-billion/>, accessed 4 March 2017

³ These figures are for the year 2010, so the amount spent now would hopefully be more than this. Moreover, this amount is for worldwide expenditures from all Christians. “Compassion in Politics: Christian Social Entrepreneurship, Education Innovation, & Base of the Pyramid/BOP Solutions,” <https://compassioninpolitics.wordpress.com/2010/08/17/how-much-is-spent-on-christian-missions-each-year/>, accessed 4 March 2017

⁴ “Missions Statistics, Message Ministries & Missions, <http://www.messagemissions.com/mission-statistics/>, accessed 4 March 2017

Okay, I got off track a little—but only a little. Think about what I have just said as you consider the impact of the message. It is almost inconceivable in our world today that individuals can exercise influence through godliness. The fact that there are exceptions only proves the rule. The Pharisees were the religious leaders, but look at Luke’s commentary on them. “The Pharisees, *who were lovers of money*, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him” [LUKE 16:14]. They heard the parable of the unrighteous manager, and they found it ridiculous.

In this day, religious leaders appear quick to speak out on issues of wealth, economics, labour-management issues. Bishops and church leaders of the various denominations seem to offer constant commentary on economic matters as though this was the sum of their service. Yet, these same denominations amass wealth in amounts that are almost incomprehensible. Could it be said of many of our denominations that they are “lovers of money?” For every religious leader denoted for righteousness, it seems there are multiple religious leaders who are denoted primarily for being religious leaders who seek more money to keep the denomination or the ministry going.

In the Apocalypse, John writes of one of the later visions when he sees a woman seated on a terrible beast; she is arrayed in purple and scarlet. The woman is adorned with gold and jewels and pearls. On the woman’s forehead is written a name, “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.” That woman is drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.⁵ John identifies that woman on a beast as apostate Christianity. Though the nations use her as the prostitute she is, they hate her [REVELATION 17:16].

John heard a voice coming out of heaven that describes this woman; that voice speaks so definitely of how western Christendom is too often seen.

“As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,
since in her heart she says,
‘I sit as a queen,
I am no widow,
and mourning I shall never see.’

[REVELATION 18:7]

From our youth, we are trained to seek power through accumulation of wealth. We place our hope in the possession of “things.” Generosity is stifled and distorted as government officials redistribute wealth, creating an economic class that is increasingly dependent upon big government. When good deeds are done, it seems as if they are trumpeted to the press to ensure maximum exposure so that all will hear and praise the one claiming to have performed the deed. Tragically, these attitudes have been carried even into the sacred precincts of the churches.

It is possible to ignore needs which are present and pressing in the name of “missions.” Jesus excoriated the Pharisees on this precise point. “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)—then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down” [MARK 7:9-13].

⁵ See REVELATION 17:1 ff.

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Ananias and Sapphira had imbibed deeply of societal attitudes that have long infected the professed people of God. We, also, must guard ourselves lest we fall into that precise trap. We can be easily swayed by the felt need for praise even as we are lying to God. We must look carefully at the One we serve, committing ourselves wholly to Him and to His cause.

SENTENCE AGAINST IDOLATRY — Ananias and Sapphira were quickly judged. Their sin became known and God held them to account. Sin will be judged, we are assured. However, some sins are judged immediately. Paul has warned, “The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgement, but the sins of others appear later” [1 TIMOTHY 5:24]. Thus, the question must be raised, “Does God actually kill believers?” The answer is an unqualified and unhesitant “Yes!”

Paul warns that some among the Corinthians had already been killed because of their sinful attitude at the Lord’s Table [see 1 CORINTHIANS 11:27-32]. Indeed, I fear that I have witnessed such judgement during the days of my service before the Lord. God does judge flagrant sin in the life of His child. In fact, we can rightfully ask, “If we are not judged, whose child are we” [see HEBREWS 12:8]?

Why was this couple judged for lying to the Spirit of God? What reason can be given for such harsh judgement? In the first place, in attempting to deceive God, this couple *demonstrated unbelief*. Ananias and Sapphira demonstrated that they had greater trust in material possessions than they had trust in God. Jesus warns any who follow Him, “Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot” [LUKE 12:15, THE MESSAGE]. God will not allow us to have two masters.

“No worker can serve two bosses:
He’ll either hate the first and love the second
Or adore the first and despise the second.
You can’t serve both God and the Bank.”

[LUKE 16:13, THE MESSAGE]

The sin of this couple *reduced the Living God to a mere convenience* rather than the holy, awesome Being He is. With the Psalmist, we glorify the Lord:

“The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble!
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
The LORD is great in Zion;
he is exalted over all the peoples.
Let them praise your great and awesome name!
Holy is he!
The King in his might loves justice.
You have established equity;
you have executed justice
and righteousness in Jacob.
Exalt the LORD our God;
worship at his footstool!
Holy is he!”

[PSALM 99:1-5]

The greed of Ananias and Sapphira *removed them from the power of godly living*. To exercise greed is to be under the control of self-concern. To be controlled by greed is to remove oneself from God's power and from His protection,

Not only did this couple lie to the Holy Spirit, they were *living a lie* through greed. When Ananias brought the money to the Apostles, he did so openly. Note that he "laid it at the Apostles' feet" [ACTS 5:2]. That is the same phrase found in verses thirty-five and thirty-seven. All the disciples were bringing their gifts which were "laid [] at the Apostles' feet." Just so, Barnabas brought his gift and "laid it at the Apostles' feet." Ananias' act was an open display designed to bring commendation to himself. His was an open lie played out before the church! The lie that Ananias lived, Sapphira spoke.

Finally, theirs was *a sin against the Bride of Christ*. Over one hundred years ago, one commentator wrote of this particular pericope, "The gravity of the offence is not to be measured by the quantity of money or the words of the lie. The sin really was not the particular deceit, but the state of heart—hypocrisy and unreality. And if sin and Satan are to find a lodgement in the church, then the ways of God will require some justification to the perplexed believer, his holiness some vindication. And so, the death of Ananias was a signal proof that though hypocrisy and impurity cannot be kept out of the church, the law of holiness remains inexorable; there can be no compromise with God's righteousness."⁶

THE CURE FOR IDOLATRY — If we will avoid the sin of idolatry that infected Ananias and Sapphira, we must *focus on the generosity of God*. Remember that Christ gave all for us. Paul reminds us, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich" [2 CORINTHIANS 8:9].

Again, *consider the glory of God*; spend time thinking of Who He is. One great need we have is to see God as holy. The writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians urges us to think on this. He writes, "Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" [HEBREWS 12:28, 29].

Then, *consecrate your life to the Living God*. We do well to remember the admonition, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" [ROMANS 12:1, 2].

If I speak to one who has been flirting with idolatry, if greed has gained an entrance into life and worship, then let such a one act quickly to turn from such sin. Let us take to heart the promise of God, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" [1 JOHN 1:9].

May God give grace and mercy to honour Him and to glorify His Name. Amen.

⁶ Richard Belward Rackham, **The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition, Eighth Edition, Westminster Commentaries** (Methuen & Co., London 1919) 64