

The Book of Acts

Lesson 14

Act 5:1-11 - Hypocrisy

Acts 5:4b-11 “....*You have not lied to men but to God.*”⁵ *And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.* ⁶ *The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him* ⁷ *Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.* ⁸ *And Peter responded to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?” And she said, “Yes, that was the price.”* ⁹ *Then Peter said to her, “Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.”* ¹⁰ *And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.* ¹¹ *And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.*

The gift to the church was a good work, but what spoiled it was the attitude, the motivation (inspired by the constant persuasion of Satan), that made the good into an evil action. Ananias appeared to be generous, but what he did was payment to gain approval of others. He didn't truly give anything away, but instead spent it all on himself.

Hypocrisy, by its nature, focuses on the good of the act, rather than the heart attitude and selfish objective. Be alert to see when your attitudes spoil a good and righteous action. Judge your sinful attitudes before they work out into an action. Turn from what is going on inside and you will have fewer consequences from actions you did on the outside. Continue to seek to grow in godly character. **Our God desires truth in the innermost being (Psalms 51:6).** Make your daily prayer, “*And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*” (Psalms 139:24)

Details about hypocrisy:

1. This is a serious sin. Ananias is not given a chance to repent after he was confronted, (how many times did God confront his conscience before?). Even though his sin may not appear to hurt others so it may not seem very serious. God is serious about sins of the heart. His wife is not warned what will happen when she lies. The instant that she verbally agrees with her husband's lie, she falls dead to the floor. In Matthew 23, Jesus pronounced many woes on the scribes and Pharisees, repeatedly calling them hypocrites. He warned His disciples, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1). Like leaven, hypocrisy starts small and we usually don't notice it by focusing on the things others see we do. Some argue that a wife should submit to her husband, even if he asks her to join him in doing wrong. This story shows the error of that view. She should have obeyed God above her husband (5:29) and told Peter the truth.
2. It is demonic. “*Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?*” (verse 3). Satan, because Ananias allowed him freedom by not confessing his sin, progressively filled his thinking. Satan is able to “speak” into our minds. He cannot provide a desire that our own sinfulness doesn't provide. He provides the persuasion that minimizes resistance to sinning. He speaks with persuasive words intending to convince believers that they should pursue an action that their imagination allows. In this case Satan's appeal to push Ananias from imagination to action was that no one would know about it. Satan's arguments persuaded Ananias to do what he

could have done without Satan's persuasion, but it appears that Satan destroyed by his arguments and persuasions Ananias' resistance which could have stopped him.

The contrast of "the filling" is that the congregation produced good works (sharing and not possessing their possessions) by the filling or control of the Spirit. They too were moved to action, but by the Holy Spirit. Satan (by the work of demons) and the Holy Spirit (present everywhere) can produce actions through persuasion. The believer can be filled by the arguments of demons, to produce an act, which displeases God. Satan probably worked in Ananias' thinking for a period of time to produce the act of lying to the Holy Spirit. This choice to lie was not instantaneous. Lies were said in a moment, but Ananias' heart had been manipulated, deceived, and persuaded for some time through Satan's repeated communication. Satan cannot reside within a believer, to control him, but from the outside, he can communicate to persuade and tempt to lead one's heart to be deceptive, lie, and produce hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is motivated by self-love. We want to impress others, to make them think that we are something that we know in our hearts we are not.

3. Hypocrisy is apart from reality, really, hypocrisy is spiritual insanity. To be in the Jerusalem church was exciting in those days. There were the large gatherings of the whole church in Solomon's portico, where thousands heard the apostles preach about Jesus (Acts 5:12; 2:47). The church had a supernaturally produced unity and concern for the physical needs of one another (Acts 4:32). God enabled the apostles to perform extraordinary miracles, which confirmed their preaching, the message of the Gospel (Acts 4:33; 5:16). Every day more Jews were being saved (Acts 5:14). Those on the outside, those Jews who were not saved, held the church in high esteem (Acts 5:13). Ananias became caught up-- in the atmosphere of being a Christian, but lacked the personal reality of practicing the presence of God.

One of the main ways to avoid hypocrisy is to make sure that you are walking in spiritual reality every day. That your life is in the presence of God, not a life lived alongside God. Our thinking to establish a persona, an outward reputation, instead of an inner reality, is pretense. When we begin to pretend to be what we really are not, corruption has entered, and believers are vulnerable to God's reaction to sin, a painful part of His discipline. The flesh can only produce corruption, which leads to physical death. When we sow to the flesh, we reap physical death. Nothing destroys the quality of one's relationship with the Spirit as flesh-producing hypocrisy.

2 Peter 2:20 – ***“If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.”***

2 Peter 1:4 – ***“Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”***