

Outline

1. Lying to the Holy Spirit
 1. Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession
 2. Laid part of the proceeds at the apostles' feet (cf. 4:34-37)
 3. They claimed that they had contributed it all
 4. Peter points out that there was no shame in what they had really done
 1. They could have kept the property
 2. They could have openly kept part of the money
 5. Ananias dies and is immediately buried
 6. Sapphira tested, died, and buried beside her husband
 7. The account brings fear
2. Continuing growth
 1. Miracles performed
 2. Some believe and join
 3. Others believe and do not join
3. Peter and John before the Sanhedrin again
 1. Imprisoned but freed and told to "stand in the temple and speak"
 2. Summoned before the Sanhedrin
 1. Reminded of earlier injunction
 2. Indignant at being held responsible for Jesus' death
 3. Peter responds
 4. Gamaliel advises to leave them alone
 5. Peter & John beaten, threatened again, and released
 1. They left rejoicing that they were "counted worthy to suffer"
 2. They continued teaching and preaching

Commentary

Regardless of the general practice (see Chapter 4 commentary), Ananias and Sapphira are not condemned for what they gave (a part of the sale price of their land), but for claiming to give that which they did not (the rest of the real price).

Norman Fultz, in a Florida College lecture, quotes the following from Don DeWelt's book, *Acts Made Actual*:

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The sin was twofold: the love of the praise of men and the love of money. No doubt those noble souls who sold that which was theirs for the help of others were admired by those of the church. This was what Ananias and Sapphira wanted, but they were not willing to obtain it through unselfish effort. Their difficulty lay in that “root” in their heart which is the source of all kinds of evil- “the love of money.” (73)

Fultz goes immediately on to note that:

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Let it not be forgotten that what was taking place in the caring and sharing going on among the believers was all voluntary, and that Ananias and Sapphira were a part of that voluntarism. They didn't have to sell the property; it could have been kept intact. Or once sold, they could have kept the funds. Giving all, or any part of the sum received from the sale of their property, was a matter of their personal choice. Their sin was not in failing to give all of their receipts. Their sin was in the attempt at deceit. (Fultz, 184)

Their deceit in proclaiming that they had donated all amounted to theft from God. The Greek word rendered “kept back” in Acts 5:2 is found only in one other place in the New Testament. In Titus 2:10, Paul tells Timothy to command bondservants that they should not

“pilfer” (ESV, NASB) or “steal” (NIV) from their masters. Swanson’s lexicon translates the word as “embezzle, steal by misappropriating.” Through their lie, they had stolen from God the full purchase price of the land (which is what they had promised to give).

The continued works of the apostles in the temple had a three-fold effect on the people: Acts 5:14 indicates that the church continued to add “multitudes of both men and women” to the Lord, yet Acts 5:13 indicates that others seemed to believe, yet were unwilling to join the church due to the third group (those who refused to believe). We should also be aware of these possible responses even today.

The High Priest’s statement that Peter and John “intend to bring this Man’s blood on us” stands in stark contrast to the cry of “all the people” heard by Pilate in Matthew 27:25, “His blood be on us and on our children!”

In Acts 4:19, Peter asks them to judge “whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God.” But, Peter now proclaims “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Peter intended in the earlier incident to cause them to think about what they were asking. This time, in giving his defense, Peter claims that (1) God had spoken to him and the others, and (2) the Sanhedrin was asking that the apostles disregard God. Having offered his defense, he repeats his charge that they had put Jesus to death, but that God had raised and exalted Him. Since this trial was about their disobeying the earlier order not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18), Peter’s statement would serve to confirm their guilt.

The Greek word translated “furious” (διεπρίοντο, dieprionto) is found in only one other place in the Bible where it describes the state of those who heard Stephen before they stoned him to death (Acts 7:54).

The punishment for the crime of contempt appears to be a beating. This was probably in the form of thirty-nine lashes with rods (cf. Deut. 25:3; 2 Cor. 11:24). The Lord promised this

type of thing in Matt. 10:17. The result of this mistreatment was rejoicing (cf. Matt. 5:11-12; Luke 6:22-23).

Thought Questions

Consider the following questions:

1. How was it that Ananias & Sapphira were lying to God and not only their brethren?
2. What lesson might there be for married couples (or those considering marriage) in the story of Ananias and Sapphira?
3. What do you think was behind the fear felt by the church and all who heard of Ananias and Sapphira?

4. What is the significance of Christ's death by "hanging on a tree" (Acts 5:30)?

5. What other passages speak of rejoicing in suffering?