

Acts: To the Ends

Spring & Summer Sermon Series



May 20, 2012

Volume 1, Issue 5

Ananias and Sapphira

The beginning of Acts 5 has troubled Christians and challenged scholars throughout the ages. For some it seems contradictory to the New Testament. Others view it solely in legalistic terms as dictating monetary stewardship.

In examining the story of Ananias and Sapphira, we need to read carefully the full context of the story, which includes reading Acts 4:32-37. One of the first decisions the reader needs to make is whether this portion of the text is descriptive or prescriptive. Descriptive readings simply describe what has happened without any commentary. Prescriptive readings prescribe something that God wants us to continue to do. Many readings can **be both**. For example, Luke's text of the Last Supper is both descriptive and prescriptive. It shows what Jesus did on that night he was betrayed and prescribes a **new supper for us ("Do this in remembrance of me")**. This section of Acts is descriptive, but as with all descriptive readings we can learn something about God and the Christian faith.

The first question we have to **grapple with is "What is their sin?"** Looking at the previous verses we

see that an upright man, named Joseph or Barnabas, sold a field and brought the money before the Apostles. The early church had a very social communal activity of giving to those who were in need. Ananias and his wife Sapphira also intended to do the same as Barnabas. As they sold the property they secretly kept a portion of the money for themselves while telling others that what was given to the Apostles was the full amount. This is plain and simple hypocrisy. Their sin was against God since both Ananias and Sapphira continued to lie about it to the Apostles, who had the full authority of the Office of the Holy Ministry. So their lies were not made to man but to God because they lied to both the Apostles and the Church. 2 **Corinthians 9:7 "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."** Ananias and Sapphira betrayed God, the Church and their hearts. They were not cheerful givers but intended to be elevated socially amongst the Church all the while keeping two lords: God and Mammon. (Cont. next page)



The Distribution of Alms and the Death of Ananias

By Masaccio, 1426-27

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Ananias and Sapphira (cont.)

Their sin was very similar to Achan in the Old Testament (Joshua 7). Achan and his family stole money and items that were dedicated to God. Because of this act, Israel was defeated at Ai and 36 people **were killed**. **Achan and his families' sin** resulted in their own deaths.

The second question is "Why did they die?"

Commentators either lean one of two ways. A few commentators believe that Ananias and Sapphira died of shock or a heart attack when confronted of their sin by Peter. While this is plausible, textually it is rather weak. Which leads to the rest of the commentators who connect their deaths to God's activity. Rev. Cwirla states "We should not presume in this episode that Ananias and Sapphira were damned. This is likely no different than those who fell asleep and even died in Corinth as a result of their inappropriate eating and drinking of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11). This was God's temporal judgment to avert ultimate condemnation with the unbelieving world, a part of God's discipline of His children whom He love (Heb. 12). We are here reminded that a healthy fear of the Lord goes hand in hand with a living faith in Christ. In this sense, 5:11 is key: Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events."

1 Corinthians 11:27-32 states "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup

of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may **not be condemned along with the world.**"

This event with Ananias and Sapphira was a judgment by God in terms of discipline. Even though that discipline for Ananias and Sapphira was their death, they were still redeemed by Christ and it was to avert an even worse judgment. One could imagine, that as Satan and his lies are weeds that furiously grow, this sin could have lead Ananias and Sapphira to depart the faith. What can we learn from this text? As stated before the fear of the Lord is key. We need to remember, as C.S. Lewis so excellently states, that God is "not a nice lion but a good one". Hebrews 12:28-29 "Therefore 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."

Study Questions:

Read Acts 6 & 7

1. Why did the disciples choose the seven?
2. Summarize Stephen's speech?
3. Who gave authority to kill Stephen? What was to become of this person?