

Judgement Begins in the House of God

by Brian Brodersen

Brian Brodersen's sermon emphasizes the critical need for the church to confront sin decisively to maintain purity and the power of God.

Duration: 33:36

Scripture: Acts 5:1

Topics: "Church Discipline", "Godly Judgment"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor Chuck focuses on Acts 5:1-14, where he discusses the early church and their practice of selling their possessions to benefit the poor. He emphasizes the importance of dealing with sin swiftly and decisively, as sin is destructive. Pastor Chuck also highlights the need for believers to prioritize their allegiance to God over their allegiance to friends and family. He references the story of Eli in the Old Testament as an example of the consequences of failing to discipline sin. Additionally, he raises the question of why, after 2,000 years, the gospel has not yet reached every person on the planet.

Transcript

As Pastor Chuck mentioned, we're going to be looking at the 5th chapter of Acts this morning, so if you'd turn with me to Acts 5, we'll take our text from the first 14 verses of the 5th chapter. This is one of those unfortunate chapter breaks because it sort of breaks right in the middle of something that's going on there. In the early church, as God was pouring out His Spirit on Jerusalem and many, many of the saints were there congregating in Jerusalem, the richer ones among them, those that possessed lands, those that were rich, they were selling their possessions and they were bringing the proceeds to the apostles and laying the proceeds before the apostles that it might be distributed for the benefit of the poorer people among them.

And at the end of the 4th chapter, we read there about Barnabas, who was a man who had lands, sold it, brought it before the apostles and laid it there at his feet. But then we have a contrast as we come to the 5th chapter, so let me read to you verses 1 through 14, Acts chapter 5. But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession and kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part 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 part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? After it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.

Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last, so great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

And Peter answered her, Tell me whether you sold the land for so much? She said, Yes, for so much. Then Peter said to her, How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those men who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out. Then immediately she fell down at his feet, breathed her last.

And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things. And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people.

And they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.

Now here in this text we have recorded for us the church's first internal encounter with sin. Up until this point the devil was coming against the church from the outside, but now we see he attempts to infiltrate the church. He attempts to get on into the inside of the church.

Now this story is vitally important because it lays out for us a picture of how God maintains purity in the church. You see the Book of Acts, as Pastor Cech has told us and will continue to remind us, the Book of Acts is God's handbook on church life and practice. And so this is God's instruction manual, if you will.

He gave us the Book of Acts and many of the epistles, but particularly in the Book of Acts he shows us how the church is to conduct itself. Now one of the great tragedies in church history is the failure of church leaders to follow God's instruction dealing with sin. Now because of that failure the church, for the most part, has been plagued by sin and hindered in its God-given objective of getting the gospel to the world.

You see that was the objective. Remember Jesus said, go into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature, make disciples of all nations. Have you ever wondered why that hasn't happened yet? I mean, after all, it's been 2,000 years.

And there are still multitudes of people on the planet today that have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. Why is that the case? I think to a large degree it is because the church is so often plagued internally by sin that it is incapable of moving ahead into that which God has called it to do. Those who are church leaders must be proactive in dealing with sin in the church and each of us individually we also must be proactive in dealing with sin in our own personal lives because the progress of the kingdom of God is to a large extent dependent on that.

You see what happens the moment sin comes in and is accommodated or tolerated, the moment we start making room for sin in the church or in our own lives, that moment we bring to a screeching halt the work of God amongst us and the work of God through us. And we want to make sure that that is not happening to us as a church. We want to make sure that that is not happening to us individually.

So there are five things here in the text that I want us to see that I think as we understand these things it will help us to avoid becoming ineffective. The first thing that I want you to notice is this. Satan will always try to find a way into the church.

Satan will always be seeking a way into your life personally. Notice what Peter said to Ananias. Peter was very attuned to the Spirit.

He recognized that this was a satanic effort. He said to Ananias, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? You see the devil is always looking for an inroad. He's always looking for a way in.

This proverb, give him an inch, he'll take a mile. If it applies to anybody, it applies to the devil. All he wants is just a slight opening.

He knows if he can just get in in any way at all that he can begin to do his work because the nature of sin is to proliferate. Once sin gets in, it begins to multiply and spread rapidly. And we have to understand that.

This seems in a sense like somewhat of a minor infraction, really, comparatively, if you think about it. I mean, after all, what did these people really do? Well, when you boil it down, they lied and they were being hypocritical. So they were guilty of deceit and hypocrisy.

But yet, in some ways, we're probably all guilty of deceit. In some ways, we're probably all guilty of hypocrisy. And certainly within the church today, you would have to agree that there's a lot of deception and there's unfortunately a lot of hypocrisy.

So why did God come down so hard? I mean, after all, this wasn't just a mild reprimand. These people were actually slain. Some people ask the question, is slain in the Spirit biblical? Yes, right here, it happened.

A little differently than you see on Christian television, but this is the real thing, being slain in the Spirit. But again, why the severe judgment? You see, because God wants to show us, He's setting a principle forth that sin has to be dealt with because sin is destructive. And again, if you let it in, it'll take over.

That's the whole point. You know, the enemy is subtle. And he suggests seemingly harmless compromises.

You know, back in the early part of the last century, many in the church, many leaders in the church, they thought, you know, it would probably be easier for people to receive Jesus Christ and become Christians and join the church if they didn't have to deal with all of the, you know, sort of mythological aspects of the Bible. And so they decided to what they would call demythologize the Scriptures. And what they meant by that is they were going to point out that the Scriptures contained certain myths, certain things that weren't actually, you know, historical events, but they were just stories to kind of communicate truth in some way.

So they decided that they would demythologize the idea of Adam and Eve, that there were actually two people that the whole race began with, that there was a Garden of Eden, that there was a tree in the midst of the garden, that there was original sin, that there was a man named Noah and a great flood that covered the earth, because they had bought into the lie that science had disproven all of that, that evolution was actually the reality about how the world came into existence. And, of course, there was no flood. So they, my point is this, they thought that they were doing themselves a favor.

And this seemed like, at the time, a harmless suggestion. But years down the road, those denominations that embraced those ideas, who at the time would have argued, no doubt, that they were still Christians and they still loved God and don't anybody challenge my belief. I believe in Jesus.

They would have argued all that, but the majority of those denominations today have forsaken the faith, because they destroyed the foundation upon which it was built. You see, the devil, no doubt, was the one who suggested that to them. And that's what he does.

He suggests seemingly harmless compromises, knowing that if he can just get his foot in the door, he can do his destructive work. And that happens to us individually as well. Personal temptations often appear as harmless thoughts or suggestions.

Oh, you know, maybe you're just sitting there in your office before your computer and maybe, you know, you get some spam email that comes up and maybe there's something there, you know. Sometimes I think it's luscious Linda who I get some emails coming through from her and I don't know who she is, but evidently she knows who I am. But, you know, as I'm sitting there and I'll go through my emails and you're reading that and then, you know, the thought will come, why don't you just check that out just to see what it is.

You probably need to know what it is and that way you can be forewarned next time. And, you know, I know that is the devil. I know that he is making that suggestion to me because I know that he knows if he can just get me going in that direction, he can possibly get a foothold in my life and ultimately bring me down.

That's the way the devil operates and we have to understand that. And that's why, coming to our second point, sin must never be accommodated or tolerated in the church or in our lives. It must be dealt with swiftly and decisively.

You see, we cannot accommodate it. We cannot give the enemy any place whatsoever. Remember what Paul said to the Ephesians? He said, give no place for the devil.

Don't give him any place. Don't give him any bit of ground whatsoever because, again, if you give him an inch, he will take a million miles. If you give him one little area of your life before it's over, he will have taken over your whole life.

That's the way it works. So we must deal with sin swiftly and decisively. We cannot accommodate it.

We cannot tolerate it. And that's what we see here in this text. Peter, God's man, this leader within the church, he stands up, he puts himself, in a sense, on the line, and he meets out the judgment against sin in the church.

And that's the way it is supposed to be. Now, it's not an easy thing to do, though, for church leaders. It's not that easy because of several things.

One, confrontation is unpleasant. Very few people like confrontation. And this is the type of thing that necessitates a confrontation.

Peter has a confrontation with this man, Ananias. Ananias is coming. He's all excited.

He's going to offer his gift. And, of course, he's excited that everybody's going to think that he's given everything. But he's got this hypocrisy.

He's got this deceit. And it would have been so easy for Peter as a leader. I know it would have been so easy for him to just say, you know, it's just a little.

And, you know, God, you deal with it. I'm not going to worry about it. I'm not going to bring this up.

It would have been a lot easier for Peter, no doubt, to do that. But he put himself on the line, and that's what leaders must do because confrontation isn't pleasant. Over the past few years, I have personally had to sit across from men, look them straight in the eye, and tell them, you are no longer fit to be in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

That is a hard thing to do. And it's especially hard to do when some of those men have been dear friends of mine. But we've got to do it.

That's what this passage is teaching us. We cannot accommodate sin. We cannot tolerate sin.

The word accommodate, you know, it means to make room for. There's no room for sin in the church. We're living in the age of tolerance.

The greatest virtue in the world today, the secular world that we live in, the greatest virtue is tolerance. And many churches are buying into that, and they're boasting about their tolerance. But we have to understand, God does not tolerate sin.

Another reason it's difficult to swiftly and decisively deal with sin is because quite often those who have to do it end up being misjudged, misunderstood. I had to deal with a situation along with some other men where we had to remove a man from ministry. He had been in an affair for a dozen years.

Unbelievable. And when it came out that that was the case, and we had to make that hard call and remove him, so many people were angry at us. They were upset at us.

Oh, you're so unloving. You're so unforgiving. What about the grace of God? So what are you people thinking? You don't understand the grace of God.

The grace of God doesn't teach us to sin and just get by with it. The grace of God has appeared to all men, teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lust and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age. So anyway, we ended up looking like the bad guys for dealing with the sin, and that's a difficult thing.

Sometimes it's hard to deal swiftly and decisively with sin because sometimes it's your friends or maybe even your family members who are involved in it. And it's so hard. These are hard things, but we have to do it because we have to have a greater allegiance, and that allegiance must be to God, and that allegiance to God must transcend our allegiance to our friends.

It must transcend even our allegiance to family members. But it's a difficult thing. Think of Eli back in the Old Testament.

He couldn't bring himself to discipline his own sons, but it brought ultimately their untimely death. David even struggled with that sort of thing. And you know, isn't it true that all of us, to some degree, we have sort of a double standard when it comes to family? Let me give you an example of what I mean, and I think you'll understand what I'm saying.

You know, you might see somebody who's obviously wicked, obviously sinful, involved in all kinds of wrong things, and somebody would ask you, Well, what about that person? You think they're a Christian? They say they're a Christian. Oh, absolutely not. They're not a Christian.

No way. I'll stake my life on it. But then you've got a family member whose behavior is identical, and when asked, Well, are they a Christian? Well, you know, I know they're struggling a little bit now, but I think in their heart they really love the Lord.

That's a double standard. We have to face the facts that even if it's family, even if it's friends, you know, there's a possibility that Ananias and Peter were friends. I don't know that they were, but they very well could have been.

Ananias might have been in the church for some time. He might have been one of those people that Peter was initially excited that he was there. But all of a sudden he has to deal with this situation.

So we cannot accommodate or tolerate sin. We must deal with it swiftly and decisively. Now, the next thing we see is that swift and decisive judgment on sin produces something that is very desirable.

It produces a fear of God among the people of God. And that's what we see here in our text. Notice in the latter part of verse 5, So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.

And then in verse 11, So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things. The fear of God is about the healthiest attitude that a church could possibly have. If there's one thing that the 21st century church needs, it is a healthy dose of the fear of God.

What do we mean by the fear of God? You know, sometimes I even have heard people say, after speaking of the fear of the Lord or the fear of God, then they want to go back and qualify that and say, Oh, no, no, don't worry. We're not telling you to be afraid of God. We're just saying, you know, we need to respect God.

Well, that's true to some extent, but really to fear God means to fear him, to be afraid, to offend him. And I think a good definition for the fear of God is a respect and reverence for God that causes one to shudder at the thought of displeasing or dishonoring him. Do we fear God as a church? Do we fear God as people individually? When temptation comes your way or the thought of jumping into sin, is there a fear that takes hold of you that you shudder inside? That's what we're talking about, and that's what seized these people, and you can understand why it would have.

Charles Spurgeon, the Victorian preacher, he said this, and I quote, There is holy fear which must not be banished from the church of God. There is a sacred anxiety which puts us to the question and examines us whether we be in the faith, and it is not to be disdained. There is a kind of fear which we have need to cultivate, for it leads to repentance and confession of sin, to aspirations after holiness, and to the utter rejection of all self-complacency and self-conceit.

Spurgeon says there's a healthy fear of God, and we shouldn't try to expunge that from our midst. But you know, sometimes a person will come, and I've seen it where a person will come, and they will actually rightfully be fearful because of their situation, and a pastor will try to talk them out of it. Oh, no, don't be afraid.

God loves you. He's grace and mercy. All of that's true, but if you are living in willful sin, there's a whole other side of the coin, and the other side is God hates sin, He will not tolerate sin, He doesn't accommodate it, and ultimately He must judge it.

The next thing we see is that this restoration or this maintenance of purity, really, Peter succeeded in maintaining the purity, but this maintenance of purity brought the power of God or allowed the power of God to continue on in that church in Jerusalem. Look at what it says in verse 12, And I personally think that as you read this, it seems like subtly there is an inference that this continued to happen because of the discipline that was meted out, because of the purity that was maintained. You see, the power of God can only be maintained while the church is pure.

People today ask the question, well, where's the power of God today? How come we don't see much going on by way of the miraculous? And what about those great conversion stories we've heard about? And, you know, people ask those questions. I think, honestly, we have to understand that it's the lack of purity in the church today that has caused us to lose much of the power that God intends us to have. So power is maintained, and then the fifth thing, purity and power, I want you to notice what they bring.

They bring respect, conviction, and conversion. When the church is pure and when the church is powerful, guess what? The church has a good reputation among those who are outside. They might not agree with the church.

They might not believe our doctrine, but they respect us. And sadly, that isn't the case today, is it? Why isn't that the case today? Because a lot of people in the world look on at Christians and they say, those Christians, we don't like them because they tell us we shouldn't do this and we shouldn't do that and we shouldn't do the other thing, and they do the very things they're telling us not to do. They're liars and they're hypocrites.

You know, it was last year that one of the, well, actually, the leading figure in the evangelical movement in this country who often would preach on morality and all of this was found soliciting sex in a massage parlor. What does that say to everybody else? It causes people to disdain the church, but when there's purity, when there is holiness, when there is the power of God, there's a respect. They might not agree with us, but they respect us.

When George Whitefield was preaching in the early days of the history of this country, Benjamin Franklin, who never became a believer, used to go listen to Whitefield and someone questioned him one time, why do you listen to him? You don't believe that, do you? He said, no, I don't, but he does and I respect him for it. And that's what we're talking about here. Now, we are living, as you well know, in times of great wickedness, but our primary concern should not be the wickedness in the world, but rather the wickedness in the church.

I think we spend far too much time talking about all the wicked things that are going on in the world and refusing to turn the mirror toward ourselves and look at ourselves. That's where we ought to be putting the emphasis. Listen to what Paul said in writing to 1 Corinthians 5-9-13.

He said, I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people, yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world or with the covetous or the extortioners or idolaters. Since then, you would need to go out of the world, but now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, anyone named a brother who is sexually immoral or covetous or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner, not even to eat with such a person. Now, listen to what he said.

For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside the world, Paul said, God will judge. He said, therefore, put away from among yourselves the evil person. We need to judge ourselves, and we cannot expect.

I do not believe that we can expect, although we talk about revival, we pray for revival, we long for revival. I don't think we can expect a revival or what we perceive to be a revival until we address the issue of sin in the church because a revival really is the church getting right with God, and then what happens when the church gets right with God, gets the sin issue dealt with, then the power of God goes forth and people outside are converted. In closing this morning, I want to ask you a very pointed question.

Are you accommodating or tolerating sin in your life? And I want you to know that if you're doing that, you're not only damaging yourself, but you are negatively affecting the entire body of Christ. You see, that's the thing. Your sin, my sin, doesn't just affect me.

It affects everybody else as well. Remember the story of Achan in the book of Joshua? God had given Israel this great victory over Jericho. They had just come into the promised land.

They conquered the city of Jericho, and then they moved on to a smaller city, the city of Ai, and they went up against it, and they were beaten. They were defeated. They fled before the men of Ai.

And Joshua fell on his face before God, and he began to lament, and, Lord, what are you doing, and why has this happened to us, and don't you know what this means? They're all going to gather against us and destroy us, and, God, you're letting us down. And Joshua's crying out, and the Lord interrupts him, and he says, Get up. He says, Israel has sinned.

That's why you've fallen before your enemies. And what had happened is one man, a man by the name of Achan, when he went into Babylon, God said, All the spoil in Jericho is mine. He went into Jericho.

He saw a Babylonian garment and a wedge of gold, and he took it for himself, and he hid it, and he didn't tell anybody but his family. And it was that one man's sin that brought the whole people of Israel down before the men of Ai. And that principle is true today.

If the power of God is missing in our church, it's because of the sin of the individuals within the church. And so we have to get right for our own sakes, obviously, but for the sake of the work of God and the sake of the larger body of Christ, we must judge sin swiftly and decisively. Listen, Paul said this.

He said, For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. God is giving you an opportunity today to judge yourself. If you pass on that opportunity, if you keep on going in sin, you will bring the hammer of God down upon your life.

But God gives us the opportunity to judge ourselves. He gives us the opportunity to respond to that conviction and to turn away from sin and to get right. And I know today that there are some here, you're living in sin, and I'm talking about blatant sin.

I'm talking about known sin. I'm talking about willful disobedience. I'm not talking.

A lady left after first service. She said, Well, I was trying to think if there was anything going on in my life. I said, I wasn't talking to you.

So I'm not talking to you if that's what you're doing. But you know who you are because I'm not talking to you. God's talking to you.

And he's telling you, I want this sin out of your life, and you need to deal with it now. And this morning, you have the opportunity. Remember, the title of the message today is Judgment Begins at the House of God.

It begins with us. That's a statement that Peter made. It begins with us.

And if God is going to continue to work in our lives, through our lives, if he's going to use us as a church, then the judgment begins right here with us. Today, if you have sin in your life, you have an opportunity to get right with God. Let's pray.

Lord, we pray this morning. We thank you, God, that you are faithful to convict us of sin. We thank you that you're merciful and you'll forgive us of sin.

But, Lord, we realize that you are intolerant of sin, and we can't go on in it. And so I pray, Lord, for anyone who's with us today, anybody who's listening in this building, outside this building, who's living in disobedience to you, who has allowed sin to come in. They've made room for sin in their lives.

They've tolerated it. Lord, I pray that you would convict them to the point of getting right with you today. So move by your spirit and help them, Lord, to do the right thing, we pray.

In Jesus' name, amen. Let's stand together. You know, this morning, I want to challenge any of you that are in sin at the end of this service to come up front and to confess that sin.

The Bible says confess your sins to one another, pray for one another. The pastors are up front here this morning, and they're here. So you can come and confess, and they can pray for you, and you can leave this place healed.

Now, you might say, well, you know, why do I need to do that? I'm just going to go home. I'm convicted, yes, I'm going to go home and get right with God. You know what? Here's why you need to do that this morning, because the devil has you in his grip, and you need to bust out of it.

And the way to bust out of it is to acknowledge your sin and to bear a little bit of shame for it so you don't go back to it again. It's easy to go home, and nobody ever knows, and you're just sort of going to try to disengage from it slowly but surely. It doesn't happen that way because the grip of sin is too strong.

You've got to break away from it. These men are up front, and they're available, and I urge you today, if you're in that place, to come forward and to let them pray with you. May God bless you, and may He fill us all with His Spirit, and may we walk in purity and in power in these days.

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