

Small, but Crucial Differences

by David Guzik

The sermon highlights the importance of purity and the danger of deception in the church, using the story of Ananias and Sapphira as a cautionary tale.

Duration: 59:03

Scripture: Acts 4:32 - 5:16, Acts 5:29-32, Acts 5:40-42

Topics: "Authenticity in Faith", "The Danger of Hypocrisy"

Description

David Guzik emphasizes the critical differences between the genuine work of God and hypocrisy in the church, using the contrasting stories of Ananias and Sapphira versus the apostles. He highlights how both instances share similarities, yet the key difference lies in the heart's intent--Ananias and Sapphira sought personal glory through deception, while the apostles focused on exalting Jesus and living in truth. Guzik calls for a deeper, private relationship with Jesus, urging believers to prioritize authenticity over image and to be open about their struggles. He concludes with a prayer for God to work in the hearts of the church, fostering a spirit of humility and boldness in proclaiming the Gospel.

Transcript

Lord Jesus, how we thank you for your word. We thank you too for your church. It's your body, Jesus.

And so we want to serve it. We want to honor you the very best we can. Lord, open the eyes of our understanding here this morning to gain something more from your word.

At a conference like this, Lord, we just feel like you pile more and more and more. And it's wonderful. But Lord, we don't want anything to get lost in the shuffle.

We don't want any precious word that you have to sustain us and to equip us. We don't want it to fall by the wayside. So let your word speak to our hearts this morning, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. All right, Acts chapter 4. We left off with Greg at verse 32. And there's a woman in our midst.

This is the men's study. Take charge, man. We're going to take a look at the text all the way through to the end of chapter 5. And it's remarkable, because we have really two big headings with the text that we have right in front of us.

Acts chapter 4, beginning at verse 32 through about 11 or 12 verses into chapter 5, you have the whole deal with Ananias and Sapphira. Then you have the second part of Acts chapter 5, all dealing with tremendous outpouring of the spirit with miraculous works. And then the great miracle of courage and boldness and deliverance that God gave to the apostles when they were faced with the opposition from the Sanhedrin.

And when you take a look at these two different phases, the Ananias and Sapphira thing, and then God's work through the apostles, you take a look at both of those things and put them on both sides of the scale. As I was looking at, I was absolutely dumbfounded at the similarities between the two. Think about this.

In two different works of God, which turned out very differently, of course, but two different works of God, you have a name that is exalted. You have a progression of the work in each case. You have unexpected assistance in each case.

In both of them, you see sacrifices made. In both of them, you see a double confirmation. In each one of the instances, you see that men were impressed.

In each one, you see God's people were suffering. In both of those cases, you see that it was a blessing to the church. And then finally, you see that the results were evident to everybody.

You take a look, and there's a lot of similarities between the two. It reminded me how geneticists say, if you compare the DNA makeup of a chimpanzee and of a human being, there's 98.5% similarity or something like that. I don't know what the exact number is.

And whatever that 1.5% difference is, everything turns upon it. And a lot of times, that's how it is when you're comparing hypocrisy in the church with the real deal in the church. There can be so many similarities.

From the outsider to a casual observer, a work that's just laced with hypocrisy or a work that has the real mark of God upon it, there can be so many similarities. But the 1% difference that there is between the two, everything turns upon the 1%. Let's go through and just sort of take really a survey.

We don't have time to go into this in depth, but in the first part of Acts chapter four, you see the sharing heart of the early church starting at verse 32. Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and of one soul. Neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

And with great power, the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked, for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the apostles' feet.

And they distributed to each one as anyone had need. And Joseph, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles, which is translated son of encouragement, a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having lands sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. Well, it's remarkable to see that the sharing heart of the early church, that they had such a casual attitude towards things.

They really had things in the right order. God was first, people were second, and things were a distant third. And so if things could be used to serve or bless or support somebody else, then they got rid of it.

And it says there in a very striking way that they had all things in common. I don't have to point out to you probably that this really is not an early form of communism at work. Sometimes you'll find people have a sort of a socialistic bent.

They'll want to point to a passage like this in the book of Acts and say, well, see, the early church practiced communism. Well, no, not at all. There's a huge difference between this and communism.

What you see in Acts chapter four is koinonia, it's not communism. Koinonia says, what's mine is yours, I'll share it. Communism says, what's yours is mine, I'll take it.

And there's an infinite difference between the two. But you see, because of the sharing heart and the attitude that they had towards their possessions, by the way, you really know that the work of God is really touching people when it changes their attitudes about their possessions. Some people, they're baptized all the way up to their wallet, and that's about it.

You know, that never really seems to go under the glory. But when you meet people who their possessions are seen in a biblical, godly perspective, then everything's different, everything changes. And you see the remarkable heart of benevolence and giving among the early church, it shows that this is at least as a miraculous work of God as tongues of clove and fire upon everybody's head.

To see them so willing to sell and to share and to hold everything in common. And then we're left, at the end of the chapter, with this remarkable man, Barnabas, who made an especially remarkable gift. I mean, it was something that just sort of what was held out in prominence.

This man apparently had great possessions of land and he sold them, he laid them at the apostles' feet, and you just kind of have that notice there. Then, if you were doing this in a movie, you'd make the orchestra play something really dark, really foreboding as you come into chapter five. It says, but a certain man named Ananias with Sapphira, his wife.

You see the contrast? You've got the great, free generosity of Barnabas. Then in opposition to that, you have this man, Ananias, and Sapphira, his wife. Now, on the surface, what they did was very similar to what Barnabas did, but that's only on the surface.

In the reality, it was a completely different thing. So let's look at that together. Verse one here, but a certain man named Ananias with Sapphira, his wife, sold a possession.

And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostle's feet. Well, that's very simple. It seems like he did exactly what Barnabas did.

They saw the great generosity of Barnabas. They probably saw how greatly it was received. I don't know, maybe I don't want to act like there was applause in the church for what Barnabas did, and you just can't think that it was really called to attention.

You can't think that there was the Barnabas memorial plaque somewhere hung up among the apostles, or the Barnabas memorial pulpit, or anything like that. But again, such a remarkable gift. People just started hearing about it.

And Ananias and Sapphira heard about it. And they said, wow, that admiration, that applause that is going towards Barnabas, we want some of that too. And so they said, well, we can get that.

We've got a piece of land. They sold it, and they came, and they brought the proceeds to the apostles, or what's very important, if you notice in verses one and two it says, he kept back part of the proceeds. Now this is where the whole thing turns.

This is that 1% or 1.5% where everything else seems very similar, but on the small matter everything else turns. They kept back part of the proceeds. And on the one hand you say, so what? They kept it back.

There were two great dangers in what they kept back. Number one, they gave it implying they gave it all. They wanted to be seen as just as generous as Barnabas.

And so they implied that they gave it all, and Peter's gonna talk about that a little bit later when he confronts Ananias and Sapphira. But the other thing that I want you to see is it says that they kept back, and the specific ancient Greek word, if you look it up in your word studies and your lexicons and all, that word for kept back really means to misappropriate. You know in the Greek translation of the Old Testament that they used in that day, the Septuagint, when it talks about the sin of Achan in the days of Joshua.

You remember Achan? He's the man who when they went and they fought against the battle of Jericho, he kept some of the possessions for himself, and everything in the city was to be destroyed as a way to saying no man will ever profit from the destruction of Jericho. Everything will be given to God, and no man will ever have any profit from it, but Achan stole some of what was taken from the city of Jericho, and he kept some of the spoils for himself. Well, that same word kept back in the Greek is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

It's used of Achan's theft. It's also used in the book of Titus chapter two where Paul uses the word in the English pilferate. So it's not just kept back in the sense of, well, you know, I kept a little for myself, and I gave the other people.

It's a sense that they pilfered this money from God because the impression was was that they gave it all. I want you to also, it says that his wife was aware of it. Husband and wife were in on this together.

And so this is what they did. Now, look at Peter's confrontation beginning at verse three. It says, but Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? Is it like this with you? A lot of times when you read this in the Bible, it's like a movie going on in your head, and you're sort of seeing the scene played out with yourself right there all in front of you.

You see Ananias and Sapphira, they come, and I don't know if this was at a church service or if it was a personal audience with Peter, and they come and they say, Peter, here's the money from the sale of land. We sold it, and we're giving it all to you. We surrender all right here.

Here it is to you, Peter. And Peter says, you know, Ananias, I wanna say something to you. And Ananias' heart is like, yes, you know, I know what they said to Barnabas.

And Peter's gonna tell me what a godly man I am. And honey, you know, isn't it beautiful right now? You know, we're gonna get some of those accolades that we really want, we deserve before the Lord. And their hearts are so puffed up, ready to hear what Peter's gonna say.

And he says in verse three, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? That's sort of a letdown to Ananias. And it's such a shock to him. He says, you've kept back part of the price of land for yourself.

Now look at what Peter says in verse four. While it remained, was it not your own? And 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. Peter didn't accuse Ananias of lying to the church.

He didn't accuse him of lying to the apostles, but only to the Holy Spirit himself. Satan filled his heart, and he practiced this great deception. I think it's important to point out here that yes, Satan was at work here, yet the sin was Ananias' alone.

Satan suggested it, but Ananias bit into it. And Peter reminds him, he says, while it remained, was it not your own? After it was sold, was it not in your own control? Peter really freely acknowledged that the money and the land, it belongs to you, Ananias. Do whatever you want with it.

Sell it, keep it, keep part of it, but don't come and act as if you're giving it all when you're not. It wasn't that Ananias' gift wasn't big enough. You know, as if Peter said, you know, well, I only want the \$10,000 club to come up and give their gifts now, and Ananias was trying to act like he was a part of the \$10,000 club when he wasn't.

That's not it at all. It's more from what Proverbs 15, eight says. It says, the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.

And Ananias thought his sacrifice was so honorable before God, and would get him so much attention and acclaim, but it was just an abomination to God. We gotta say, isn't the spirit of Ananias alive and well in the church today? You know, we want to be considered spiritual, but not really pay the price that we need to pay in our service to God. Your attitude is sort of like the attitude that Jacob had when he was meeting Esau.

You know, when he was gonna meet Esau, he sent forward all these gifts in front of him. First, I'll send the sheep. Then I'll send the goats.

Then I'll send the camels. Then I'll send the cattle. Then I'll send my family.

And that's usually how it goes with us. You know, what do we give to God? Okay, God, well, I'll give you the sheep. Does that satisfy you, God? All right, well, that didn't satisfy you.

Then I'll surrender the goats to you. Then I'll surrender the camels. We'll just try to find out how much God will be satisfied with, you know, sort of leave us alone, and well, then that's great.

Instead of I surrender all. This tendency of Ananias, it's within us all. God, how little do I have to give you and sort of make you happy? And God wasn't having it, and Peter wasn't having it.

And you notice what happens here, verse five. Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. Then one of the great, great understatements of the Bible.

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. That's pretty heavy, folks.

You wonder if God were to apply this kind of discipline to the church today, slain in the spirit would have a whole nother meaning within the church, wouldn't it? He fell down and breathed his last. And look, on the surface, we shouldn't kid ourselves. This seems pretty harsh, doesn't it? I mean, you and I may look at this and say, you know, I have brought far worse sin than this into the house of God, and he hasn't struck me dead.

Some of you, if you'd be honest with yourself, and if I'm honest, I'd say, I brought far worse than this into the pulpit, and God hasn't struck me dead. Say, you know, man, it certainly shows that it's the grace of God. It's not that I haven't deserved, or you haven't deserved to be struck dead in God's presence.

It shows that God was doing something special here. The wonder isn't that God struck down Ananias. The great wonder is that God delays his righteous judgment in virtually all other cases.

Ananias got exactly what he deserved, and he just simply could not live in the atmosphere of purity that marked the early church at that time. You could go on and on. I wonder if maybe the physical means by which Ananias died wasn't a heart attack.

I mean, it says that he heard those words, and he was just stricken and terrified, and when he heard how his sin was exposed in front of everybody, he just couldn't take it anymore, and he had a heart attack right then and right there, and I don't wonder as well that God was perhaps less merciful, less lenient with the sin of Ananias in that context because it was at such a crucial time in the early workings of the church. You know, that sort of impurity, that sin, that scandal, that really a satanic infiltration, wasn't it? Because what did Peter say to Ananias? Satan's filled your heart. You know, we see in this a whole shifting of the strategy of Satan.

So far up to this point, we've seen Satan oppose the church in the book of Acts, but at the beginning and in the day of Pentecost, it was by mocking, and then later on, it was by threats and arrest, and you see Satan trying to intimidate the church, trying to sort of make the church cower. Now Satan's sort of adopted the attitude in chapter five, well, if I can't beat him, I'll see if I can join him, and he's infiltrating the church through a heart like Ananias' heart, and God says, I won't have this, especially when the church is at such a foundational place. If this kind of corruption creeps in now, then the very root of the church is corrupted.

You know, sometimes I wonder if that's not why we sense that there's a difficulty in the early days of a working in our church when we're out at a church plant. I don't wanna give the impression that God is more concerned with purity in the church at one time or another. God is always concerned with it, but might I say that a pocket of impurity has the potential to do more harm when a work is in its very foundational setting.

God is just as concerned with the impurity at any level, but at the foundational setting, that impurity can corrupt everything that flows forth from it since. So God said, no, at this very root place of the church, I have to deal with this, not unjustly, not too harshly, but I'll just simply give it the measure it deserves instead of granting an extraordinary mercy or forbearance to this. I think one of the reasons why we don't see God judge the church in this same way today, in the same severity or as often at least is because the tree of the church, so to speak, has so many branches.

I mean, if you wanna think about it, even if the church in the United States of America, even if it were to become completely corrupt and completely set aside from God's purposes altogether, just a totally Ichabod church where the glory of God had completely departed, even if that were to be the case, then

there is still the work of God going on here in Europe. There's still the work of God going on in every continent of the world, and you couldn't say that the work of God had perished from the face of the earth. But here, when the church is still contained in Jerusalem, in Jerusalem alone, if that's corrupted, then everything that flows forth from it since is going to be corrupted, and that's why God, if you will, was more zealous for purity at the root.

But I'm sort of fascinated, almost taken by the fact that the shock of being exposed was too much for Ananias. Man, it's scary, and I see it in my own heart. I see it in that for many of us as Christians, when we're in a time of compromise, our greatest fear is not in the sin itself.

Our greatest fear is in being found out. Isn't that corrupt? Don't you want God to purify you from that? You know, would to God that Ananias would have had the heart that he would have been terrified, that he would have started feeling the chest pains when he contemplated this sin so based in greed, and pride, and self-seeking. That's what it was all about.

Ananias wanted to be exalted. He wanted to be lifted up. This was more about pride than it was about greed.

He should have had the chest pains right then, right when he was contemplating that sin. But instead, so often, like us, it shows us that we're corrupt sometimes in the way that what people think about us is more important to us than what God thinks about us. And if we can hide a sin from man, we've somehow feel that we've succeeded.

Guys, get it out. It is sobering. Anytime you stand before a gathering of men like this or Christian leaders, you wonder, you scratch your head and you say, what secret sin is among us here? And maybe you're wondering if you should even come to this conference.

He said, well, what if my secret sin somehow gets exposed? You know, who knows if God's not gonna give a word to Pastor Brian, you know, walking by me on the thing and say, brother, God's told me something about you. Maybe I shouldn't even go. And I don't know.

Maybe this is a unique group and there's not any shameful secret sin among us. But I doubt it. We're all men.

The temptations and the trials and the struggles that face us are common to men, aren't they? So men, let's just do business with God while we're here this week. Let's put it away. Let's let the shame of our sin before God in heaven be far more of a concern to us than the shame of our sin before other people and get it right with Him.

Nevertheless, God's purpose was really accomplished in the church at large. You see here where it says that great fear came upon all those who heard these things. I mean, God still accomplished His work.

He wasn't gonna let this occasion with Ananias and Sapphira become a waste. If you notice how it goes on here in verse seven, when Peter confronts Sapphira, this is almost worse. And now it happened 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.

And she said, yes, for so much. Can you almost see Peter wincing when she says that? I wish you wouldn't have said that, Sapphira. I'm giving you a chance right here to repent.

I'm giving you a chance to be truthful, to have more of a heart of integrity for God than pride in your own heart. Verse nine, then Peter said to her, how is it that you've agreed together to test the spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out. Then immediately she fell down at his feet and 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 those who heard these things. That's like the chorus to the little song here.

It's repeated twice for us. Great fear came upon all the church. You know, by the way, this is first usage of the word church in the book of Acts.

And isn't it a curious context? Great fear coming upon knowing of how the eyes of the Lord searches the hearts of those in the church and how serious they should be because of it. There's a lot of interesting questions we could discuss and I won't get into them now. Maybe if you have a chance, we could talk about these things later.

Were Ananias and Sapphira saved? What was God doing in the midst of all of this? That's time we could discuss some other time. But let's look now at what God was doing in the midst of this real purity, in the midst of this time when there was a great fear of the Lord. This is sort of the second half.

The first half was what God did with Ananias and Sapphira. Now look at the continuing power in the church. Verse 12, 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 esteem them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Wasn't that spectacular? And don't miss the connection between the tremendous purity, between the great reverence and respect of God that you see in the aftermath of the whole Ananias and Sapphira charade. In the aftermath of that, this tremendous purity and interest and reverence for God into this great power that's being poured out upon the church and through the church. It's no wonder that it was through the hands of the apostles that God did all these works and that great power was evident within the church.

Yeah, it really shows us, too, that our real seeking should not be for the power in and of itself. You know, we want this power from God, don't we? And we want God to use us in a mighty way. But seeking after power from God can in itself become an idol.

It could be something that you seek with the same heart that Ananias and Sapphira had. You want the power of God so that it'll lift you up and exalt you. You know, Lord, make it to where my shadow falls upon people and they get healed.

What a great reputation I could build through that. Why, my name would be spread abroad all throughout the land. Boy, that would draw people.

But you see, that's taking it completely backwards. It was built on the humility of this great reverence to God. Then the power of God came forward.

Our job, really, is to interest ourselves with reverence in God and honoring him and seeking him. Remember that we shouldn't seek him for the power. I think of that great passage in the book of Ephesians, that exhortation of Paul, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

I mean, that tells us that God's power, his tremendous power is given to us as a resource. And we can be strong in the power of his might. Every one of us, as ministers of the gospel, should be interested in the power of God and how that power can flow in us and through our ministry.

At the same time, we don't make it an idol. We don't make that a focus. We seek after God and we seek after reverencing him and honoring him in the ministry.

And we just really sense that the power is gonna flow through that. We also see that God was really building the reputation of the church. We see how he's giving him favor in the community and people are coming to the Lord.

And even the sin of Ananias and Sapphira didn't bring scandal upon the church, but because it was handled properly, it really brought even a greater reputation because of the work of the Lord through the church. And it continues on here, verse 17. Whenever you see that the work of God being poured out in a great way, you're gonna see Satan busying himself even more.

What was it? Wasn't it J. Edwin Orr? He said that whenever the work of God is revived, the second party to be revived is the devil. And so you see, you know, God at work doing great things. And so the devil redoubles his efforts, verse 17.

Then the high priest rose up and those who were with him, which is the sect of the Sadducees, and they were all filled with indignation and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. They were indignant at the work of Jesus. They, we saw them before in chapter four.

Greg talked about that wonderfully earlier this morning, how the religious leaders were indignant at the work of the apostles. Well, here they are again. They're just outraged at this great work going on through these men.

Verse 19, they're all in prison. But at night, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, go stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life. Isn't that glorious? They're all in prison.

Now, what are they thinking about in prison? You know, they've got to be thinking, well, this is it. You know, Jesus said, he told us, they're all remembering the words of Jesus together. We heard Jesus say that a disciple isn't above his master and our Lord was crucified, I guess we're next.

Well, guys, you know, praise the Lord. It's been a great run. God's done a lot of great things.

We trust that the thousands who have come to Christ, you know, since our testimony, that God will use them even after we pass from the scene. Maybe they're getting kind of nostalgic there in the prison and, you know, telling the old stories like we like to tell when we get together at a time like this, but God didn't have that for them. God brought an angel to the prison and the angel opened up the prison doors and let

them out.

Those angels ministering spirits for all those who inherit salvation. God dispatched an angel to open up the prison doors and they're set free. You know, this is something you really have to remember too, that God's work isn't the same every time.

Can't you imagine the next time they were in prison? Because this wasn't the last time that the disciples, many of them, the apostles were in prison time and time again. They're always looking for that same angel to come. Well, God, aren't you gonna send him again? No, he works one way one time, another way another time, but this time he set them free.

And I love it how it puts it there in verses 19 and 20. In verse 20, the angel told them, go stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life. They were set free, but set free for a purpose, that they might go out and do the exact same thing that got them into trouble before.

They weren't set free just so that they could indulge their own comfort or save their own skin. You know, we would have wanted the angel to say, you're free, run for the hills, get out of here. No, go do exactly, exactly what you did before that got you in trouble, as we might imagine it's gonna get them in trouble again.

Verse 21, and when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together with all the elders of the children of Israel and sent to the prison to have them brought. And when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported saying, indeed, we found the prison shut securely and the guard standing outside before the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside.

Now, when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priest heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. So one came and told them saying, look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people. Somebody's gotta make a good movie of this.

You know, sometimes I've seen the, you know, they've got video representations of the Book of Acts and it's okay, but you know, it's not as good as the movie in my head. You know, the movies I've seen of the Book of Acts and this, they're okay, but like when Peter preaches on the day of Pentecost, he's preaching to a couple dozen people. You wonder where the thousands came from.

You know, to really do this right, you'd need a cast of thousands on the temple mount. You'd need an incredible investment of all these sets and extras and all of that. And this would have been a remarkable scene.

You'd have to get the best actors around to really get the kind of look that the high priest must have had on his face when they found out that these men, well, they're not in prison, where are they? They're on the temple mount. They're teaching the people all over again. So look what happens.

Verse 26, and the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. You know, now this is a testimony to me of what godliness there was among the apostles. Honestly, man, if we were among them, could we have resisted the temptation to use the popularity and the goodwill of the crowd against the police and against the guards that came to arrest us? I mean, how easy would have it have been for Peter to stand up and call out to the people who love them and say, what, are you gonna let them carry us away again? Would have been very easy for him to

incite a riot with a few words, he could have done it.

But what godliness and self-control to go along with these guards and to do this. In verse 27, and when they had brought them, they set them before the council and the high priest asked them saying, did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you fill Jerusalem with your doctrine and intend to bring this man's blood on us. Now you love it because first of all, they really heard, they knew what these guys were teaching.

They knew they were teaching the name of Jesus. They knew that they were teaching the blood of Jesus and the work of Jesus on the cross. They couldn't miss it.

I mean, the preaching of the apostles was so clear and so focused on what Jesus did on the cross for them that they knew it very well. Don't you also love it how these religious leaders cannot bring themselves to say the name of Jesus? This man, that name, that guy you preach about, they just can't bring themselves to say the name and they brought them before the council again. We told you not to do this and you can only imagine what the apostles feel.

You wouldn't blame them for being afraid because they're standing before the council and now they know they've got them really mad. At the same time, you wouldn't be surprised if they just had more courage than ever. I mean, when you know that the night before God sent an angel on your behalf to set you free from prison, you're so full of that confidence.

Well, what can't God do? God could do anything he wanted to. If he wanted to, he could strike this whole council dead in a moment and we'd walk out of here. If he wanted to, he could find it some other way that we can't even think about to cause us to escape this violence.

You can imagine them standing there with such boldness, such confidence, and that's what we see in Peter in verse 29 where he says, but Peter and the other apostles answered and said. By the way, it says, and the other apostles. You get the feeling that Peter was the main spokesman, but you gotta think that Bartholomew or Nathanael or Matthias or whatever, they probably piped in sometime and added something along the way.

It said, we ought to obey God rather than man. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. That's boldness.

Yeah, you remember Sanhedrin? This is the guy that you murdered. You did it. He goes on here now, where are we? Verse 31, him God exalted to his right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

And we are his witnesses to these things. And so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him. When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.

Well, you can't blame the apostles at this moment. They're feeling this is it. It's the same thoughts going through their mind.

Well, it's been a good run, guys. And if we're gonna go out, let's go out with a bang. Let's lay it right out on the line of the Sanhedrin, telling them who Jesus is, what they did to him, and what they have to do.

God's trying to grant repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. It's found in Jesus' Sanhedrin, you need to repent. And it seemed like it was all over at the end of verse 33, but God brought deliverance from a unique place.

Verse 34, then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. And he said to them, men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago, Thutis rose up claiming to be somebody.

A number of men, about 400 joined him. He was slain and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away many people after him.

He also perished and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone for if this plan or if this work is of men, it will come to nothing. But if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it lest you even be found to fight against God.

There is three things we can say about this little speech of Gamaliel. First of all, we just have to praise God for the deliverance that it brought for the apostles. I mean, what a timely word in a timely setting.

And this was just so of God and who would ever expected that God would have raised up one of the Sanhedrin themselves to argue on behalf of the apostles and to let them go. And this is at least as great a miracle as God sending the angel. Matter of fact, it's a greater miracle.

The angels don't argue when God sends them, we do. And it's a marvelous miracle. So that's one thing we can observe about it.

The other thing we can observe is the wisdom in the Gamaliel principle. You know, there's tremendous wisdom in that. Isn't that what we see from so much of the work of God in us and around us? The work of God is proven.

If it's of God, you can see it. It'll be proven over time. And Jesus said a proverb or quoted a proverb that's sort of similar idea.

Wisdom is justified by its children. In other words, you just see how things will work out. If something's of God, it'll work.

If it isn't of God, it'll fold. And you just know. A lot of times the people who have sent us out in ministry have had that kind of attitude, right? They looked at us when they were sending us out.

You know, we might've been all full of confidence. Oh yes, God, just keep me humble, Lord, when you do those tremendous things. And God says, don't worry, I'll keep you humble, you know? And the pastors or whoever who was sending us out, you know, they kind of look at us and they looked at us the same way we look at other fellows now.

And we go, you just wait. You know, I wish I could explain so many things to you, but I can just see that you're only gonna learn these things by learning them yourself by experience. And if it's of the Lord, we'll know.

If it's not of the Lord, we'll know. There's a lot of wisdom in the Gamaliel principle, yet not for Gamaliel. Again, I think that we should apply this Gamaliel principle a lot of times in the works that we look at and the work of God that's done.

But at the same time, Gamaliel was dead wrong. You know, he's sort of adopting a wait and see attitude. Well, let's see how this whole thing plays out.

But you know what? God had put more than enough evidence right in the face of Gamaliel where he should have got on his knees and embraced Jesus Christ right at the moment. God didn't need to give any more evidence to Gamaliel or any of the rest of that Sanhedrin for them to be persuaded. So I like the principle itself more than Gamaliel's application of it to himself.

But it's a valid principle. See how the chapter wraps up here, verse 40. And they agreed with him.

And when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, don't forget that, it's not like they just said, well, just go. They beat them and they beat them pretty severely. You can imagine how frustrated the Sanhedrin was with the apostles.

And so when they ordered them beaten, they ordered them beaten with frustration. They took it out on them pretty badly and on their backs. And then they commanded them that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.

So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Well, that's just glorious.

And how could they do anything different? When they saw what great things God did for them, when they saw the tremendous miracles that were being worked in their midst, when they saw the angel come and free them from prison, when they saw God working behind the scenes to change the heart of a hardened Pharisee to argue on their behalf, when they saw the great things that God had done on their behalf, how could they flag or fail in any way from preaching forth the name of Jesus boldly and with everything that they had? Now, we have these two basic events. You have the whole incident with Ananias and Sapphira, and then you have the whole great work of God's marvelous works to the apostles here before us here and what we've taken a look at. And on the surface, well, it's completely different.

No, do you remember when I spoke at the beginning, I told you all the similarities between them? Well, think about the great similarities. In each instance, a name was exalted. Well, in the first one, Ananias and Sapphira, they wanted their names exalted, didn't they? In the second part, we see the name of Jesus exalted.

Secondly, in both of these instances, we see a progression of the work. Do you see the wicked progression in Ananias and Sapphira? It started out with greed and then pride and then a lie and then a denial and it ended in death. That's a wicked progression.

But with the apostles, you see a glorious progression. You see works of tremendous healing, and then you see the angel freeing them, and then you see tremendous boldness, and then you see the great miracle of God working in the heart of Gamaliel. You see progression in that one as well.

In both of them, there was a progression of the work. Thirdly, you see unexpected assistance. There was unexpected assistance in this account of Ananias and Sapphira.

Isn't it remarkable how God spoke by a word of knowledge supernaturally to the heart of Peter and told him they're holding something back? I don't think Peter heard about it through the real estate agent grapevine. I think God spoke to his heart miraculously, supernaturally, and told him there's something wrong going on here. It needs to be corrected.

There was unexpected assistance in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, and so was there in the case of the disciples or the apostles before the Sanhedrin. There was unexpected help from Gamaliel. In each one of the instances, sacrifices were made.

Friends, don't think that it wasn't a sacrifice for Ananias and Sapphira to sell that property. You know, that's what's so foolish about it. They made a sacrifice, and if they would have just made a complete sacrifice, everything would have been fine, but holding something back and wanting the image of being somebody who sacrifices all, that's what killed them, but they made a sacrifice, and of course, the apostles made a sacrifice as well.

They sacrificed the skin on their backs. There was a double confirmation in each one of these instances. First, you had the confirmation of Ananias dropping dead, and then the double confirmation of Sapphira dropping dead, as shows it's no accident.

In the case of the apostles, you have a double confirmation. At first, you have the liberty given to them by the angel, and then you have the liberty given to them by the unique setting of Gamaliel. It showed them God wanted them free, proclaiming his word.

In each one of the instances, you have men who were impressed. First of all, they were impressed at the generosity of Ananias and Sapphira. Don't think that people, when they heard about Ananias and Sapphira's gift before Peter called them short, they probably admired them.

They probably got some pats on the back for it, but in the other case as well with the apostles, you have men impressed at the integrity and the tenacity of the apostles. You can just see it in the frustration of the Sanhedrin. They're tearing their hair out.

What can you do against these men who cannot be stopped? You see as well God's people suffering in both occasions. The suffering's obvious in Ananias and Sapphira. They suffered death, but there was also suffering, of course, with the apostles.

They had the beating, and then they had the threats that they had to live under. You had in each one of them blessing to the church. The blessing with Ananias and Sapphira was of great fear to the church.

The blessing under the apostles was great growth and miraculous works, and then finally the results were evident to everybody. In both the case of Ananias and Sapphira, everybody heard, and in the case of the apostles before the Sanhedrin, the results were clear to everybody. So it's just like that genetic makeup between the chimpanzee and the human being.

99.5, 98.5, whatever you want to say percent, it's all the same. Then where's the critical point that turns? What makes these two events so different? What divides the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira from the real deal, the real genuine work of God that was seen in Peter and the apostles? Well, let me show you

the contrast I see in this, and I'm sure you saw them too. I'm just echoing what you've probably figured out.

It's probably in your notes as you've been writing down. You're saying, well, why isn't he pointing this out? Well, why isn't he pointing? I'll point it out right now. With Ananias and Sapphira, you have the contrast there of image versus reality.

You know what it was all about for Ananias and Sapphira was wanting to have a spiritual image. The apostles, they didn't really care about their image. What they wanted was the reality of a walk before God.

I think that probably there's no culture on the face of the earth more obsessed with image over reality than American culture. But I know you have it in Europe as well. It's just something because it's common to the depraved heart of man.

For some reason, it can be more important to our depraved hearts that we have the image of spirituality than that we're genuinely spiritual. Well, I don't have to be spiritual just as long as you people think I am. That's all that's important.

Well, you know, that can get you by for a while. It really can. You can keep things running sort of in a mechanical way on that ground, but you can't keep it running before the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's a house of cards that's gonna crash. Man, it's searching. What Brian spoke last night was so searching for me and so appropriate for us all.

You gotta get back to the reality of it and the reality of your relationship with Jesus Christ. You may have an image where everybody around you thinks you're a wonderfully spiritual man. You know in your own heart how much that's backed up by the reality.

Guys, may it be said of us that we're much more like the apostles instead of Ananias and Sapphira where what really concerns us is the reality and not the image. I'm not saying that image is unimportant. The Bible says that we should have a good reputation, but image takes care of itself as we're concerned with the reality of our character.

Secondly, Ananias and Sapphira were concerned about their own name, where the apostles were concerned about the name of Jesus. Isn't that a difference? We shouldn't waste any time trying to build up our own name. Our own name is unimportant.

You can't have a concern for that. What you really need to have a concern for is exalting the name of Jesus, letting Jesus be the focus of your ministry, letting people walk away from your messages, not saying what a clever preacher or what a great speaker or wow, what great things he's had, but what a great savior he has. What a great Jesus he serves.

I want that Jesus. Ananias and Sapphira, they were concerned about establishing and glorifying and lifting up their own name, but it's very evident that the apostles from beginning to end, they had a passion to exalt the name of Jesus. Thirdly, you have the contrast between secrecy in the case of Ananias and Sapphira and openness in the case of the disciples.

Ananias and Sapphira were all about keeping secrets, right? There they are appearing before Peter. Here, Peter, here's the gift. It's everything that we gave from selling the land, and they've got their fingers

crossed behind their back, don't they? And they're keeping it a secret.

They're hoping nobody finds out. Oh, come on, honey, it's just our little secret before everybody, and nobody has to know. It's just you and I. They're about secrecy.

Look at Peter and all the apostles. Their openness, man, they want to tell it to everybody. Ananias and Sapphira want to keep it controlled, compact, just between themselves.

Instead, you have, oh, you have Peter. They want to shout it from the Temple Mount, let everybody know who can know. You know, a good way to measure where your walk is, guys, you know, the Lord has been just touching me on this.

He's been nailing me on this in my own life. What are you keeping secret in your life? Here's a tough one. What do you keep secret from your wife? What do you keep secret from other people? I'm not saying that there aren't private things in your life that are really your business or the business of you and your wife and nobody else.

There's a difference between private and secret. Secret has that tinge of scandal around it, doesn't it? Now, what do you keep in secret? No, the real pattern. We're walking in the way that the apostles modeled for us and that Jesus especially showed for us.

It's the way of openness. And then finally, I think that the fourth and probably the most important one, it's just an echo of what Brian was saying last night, that the real difference here is that Ananias and Sapphira had more of a public relationship with Jesus, where the apostles, you can tell, they had a private relationship with Jesus. You know, behind this pulpit at a conference like this, we all have a public relationship with Jesus, don't we? And it's wonderful.

I'm not saying that the public relationship with Jesus is bad, and you have to have it. But you know, we need to have the private relationship with Jesus to back it up. Every one of you have experienced this, and there's probably some pretty funny stories if we could get them out from among ourselves.

You know, the guy who's the total boozier or the pothead or the sexually immoral guy, and there's no control in his life whatsoever. He's a notorious sinner, and maybe he's attending your church off and on. And man, does he love to witness.

Man, does he love to tell people about Jesus all the time. And you kind of see, he's got the public relationship with God where he's telling people about God, but where's his private relationship with Jesus? It must be nowhere to be found. Because for some reason, he doesn't hear the word of Jesus to his life about those private things.

Ananias and Sapphira, they look pretty good in public. You know, standing before Peter and the rest of the apostles with their check in their hand, laying it down. I surrender all.

That looked pretty good in front of everybody. And it could have gone with just the applause if God had not given that supernatural word of knowledge to Peter. But God exposed it.

It showed that really what it was about in the life of Ananias and Sapphira was that public relationship with God. I hope every one of us, I hope we study better in private than we preach from the pulpit. I hope that we pray better in private than we pray at the pulpit.

I hope we worship better in private than we worship in front of other people. Because that's what the apostles had. I'll steal a verse from Greg's text, verse 14, excuse me, verse 13 of Acts chapter three.

Wasn't that precious? You notice it this morning. It said that they realized that they had been with Jesus. That talks about the private relationship, right? Don't you want people to be able to say that of you? You know, I don't know much about this guy.

Maybe he's not very eloquent. Maybe he doesn't have a lot of his I's dotted and T's crossed. But I can tell something, that man's been with Jesus.

That's the private relationship. I guess what I'm sharing with you this morning, guys, is it's part of just the overflow of my own heart, my own life, because in recent months, God's just been working this in my life. Oh, I wanna get back to a closer and closer private relationship with the Lord than ever.

And let me tell you, if you get started and maybe you've been cold in that private relationship, and sometimes it's like working out, you know? You haven't been to the gym in months and months, or you haven't gone out for that jog in six months. And you go out for the first time, and man, it just kills you, doesn't it? And sometimes it's a little like that when you try to rebuild that private devotional life with the Lord when it's been cold before. It's a little bit awkward at first, but when you stick with it, what sweet reward there is from God with you.

And you just realize that there's precious things that the Lord wants to give to you in the private place that you're just not gonna get in the public relationship with the Lord. And really, the two absolutely have to relate upon each other. Our relationship with God was never intended to be merely private, but also public as we share God with other people and minister to others.

But if it's only public and not private, then there's a great, great imbalance going on. I've been reading some Oswald Chambers, a great book of his, and he gave an illustration that I can't pass up. He's talking about how it's like in the military when they're fighting a war.

And he says, they never make the munitions up at the front. You know, they're not assembling the shells and the bombs and the missiles. They're not doing that at the front lines and the trenches.

It'd be crazy to have accidents. You wouldn't put them together properly. You wouldn't do it with the precision.

No, you assemble the munitions in the back lines. You assemble all the missiles and all the mortars and everything. That's all assembled in the back line.

And then you bring that ammunition up to the front lines and it's all ready and it's ready to fire. But guys, that private relationship with the Lord, that's where we build up the munitions, isn't it? And then when we go up to the front lines, that's where we use it. That's where the power is in ministry.

Where you're all equipped. Look at the ammo, it's there. It's because it's all been built up in the private time with the Lord.

And some of us, we're going up to public ministry either with no ammo or we're desperately trying to fashion munitions right there on the front line. God says, no, that's not my order. Relate to me first in the private relationship and then I'll use you beautifully in the public relationship.

To me, that's that little piece of genetic difference there, so to speak, that separates what in many ways are similar works between Ananias and Sapphires and the great works of the apostles. Oh, but it's something I know God's trying to work in me and I think he wants to work it in you too. So should we pray and ask him to do it? You know, Father, we know that you're gonna glorify yourself in us and through us.

We would just so much rather that you do it in the fashion that you did it with the apostles than the way that you brought great fear upon the church through your work with Ananias and Sapphires. You know, Lord, you could discipline us in ways that would bring great fear upon the church. And Lord, I suppose that for too many of us, we would say silently before you that you have every right to do it.

Lord, we ask for your mercy and we thank you for times of reflection and wake up calls like this. We ask that you'd help us to take them seriously and instead, Lord, fashion us after the pattern of the apostles that others would look at us and see us as men who had been with Jesus. And because of that empowering that we'd be bold, we'd be fearless, we'd be humble, we'd be beautiful instruments that are just used as an extension of your hand.

Thank you, God. Thank you so much for this week, for Lord drawing me here to be a part of it, to receive and to give. Lord, put a blessing on each one of us with the work you wanna do on us in the aftermath of this message, but then all through this week.

Bless our wives and all the women upstairs too, Lord, how they need refreshing, Lord, how they need to be built up and have your spirit poured out upon them. So work in us together, God, and we give you ourselves today and for the rest of this week in Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

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