

Text: Acts 5:1-16, Title: The Walking Dead, Date/Place: NRBC, 9/2/07; The Road 10/30/16

- A. Opening illustration: Tell about that Church of God evangelist praying at the invitation... At the end of the island I noticed a small green frog. He was exactly half in and half out of the water. He was a very small frog with wide, dull eyes. And just as I looked at him, he slowly crumpled and began to sag. The spirit vanished from his eyes as if snuffed. His skin emptied and drooped; his very skull seemed to collapse and settle like a kicked tent. ... An oval shadow hung in the water behind the drained frog: then the shadow glided away. The frog skin bag started to sink. I had read about the water bug, but never seen one. "Giant water bug" is really the name of the creature, which is an enormous, heavy-bodied brown beetle. It eats insects, tadpoles, fish, and frogs. Its grasping forelegs are mighty and hooked inward. It seizes a victim with these legs, hugs it tight, and paralyzes it with enzymes injected during a vicious bite. Through the puncture shoots the poison that dissolves the victim's muscles and bones and organs--all but the skin--and through it the giant water bug sucks out the victim's body, reduced to juice. Hidden sins can suck the life out of us.
- B. Background to passage: After the little parenthetical five verses about the unity of the church, Luke gives us a positive example of this unity in Barnabas' giving of the proceeds of the sale of some land. Then he gives an account, lest the first pictures of the early church seem too idealized, of the first imperfections seen in the church. Some find this account repulsive or difficult to deal with personally. And we live in a religious culture that rarely takes to heart the seriousness of sin within the church. So, Luke reminds us with graphic clarity of God's special hatred for the sins of hypocrisy and religious deception, and the purity of his church.
- C. Main thought: In the text we will see three aspects of the first imperfection recorded of the early church.

A. **The Sins of the Saints (v. 1-4)**

1. Explain that according to the text, this giving of property was not mandatory. Nor was it mandatory that they give all the proceeds. The problem with the whole scenario was that Ananias and Sapphira wanted to look deeply spiritual in front of the church. They wanted to be known as generous givers. They wanted all the prestige of being part of the "gold-club" givers. It is a sin of the heart, but it led to a sin of the tongue, in which they lied to the church, and thus to the Holy Spirit of God. The word used in v. 3, translated "kept back," means to pilfer or embezzle. The implication is the willful deception of others. It is only used one other time in the NT, but is used in a significant story in the OT—Achan in Joshua 7. Luke probably intends to draw some parallels with that account. For there as well you have a prominent member of the people of God who has not only deliberately disobeyed, but they have concealed the sin. And as we will note later, the punishment is similar. Peter also notes that this event was satanically inspired. However, it doesn't remove responsibility, as indicated twice by the text. Jesus was kind and compassionate to the tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners, but he had little mercy upon religious hypocrisy.
2. Josh 7:11, Luke 12:3, Num 32:23, Matt 6:1-2, 15:7-8, 24:51,
3. Illustration: "Would I refuse a big donation that was corrupted? "God is holy and holiness (is) the moral condition necessary to the health of his universe. ...Whatever is holy is healthy, ...the holiness of God, the wrath of God, and the health of creation are inseparably united. God's wrath is his utter intolerance of whatever degrades and destroys. He hates iniquity as a mother hated the polio that would take the life of the child." –Tozer, speaking of the ugliness of sin, MacArthur says, "none is so ugly in God's sight as those who flaunt a spiritual beauty that they do not possess," the leader of one major international ministry said that they must overlook a lot of mistakes made in good faith by their personnel, and clean up the messes willingly, but the one thing that they will not tolerate at any level is deception and dishonesty,
4. God is no respecter of the rich. Peter confronts the biggest giver head on. The desire to look extremely spiritual is in ALL of us. So, as Jesus said we should be careful about throwing stones. But the reality of this situation demonstrates the severity of the offense of such desires. We must guard our hearts diligently against the desire to look good in front of others. We should do violence against the propensity for us to put on more than we actually do. Furthermore, we must realize that lying, deception, and other such sins to the church, are the same as lying to God Himself. This is why open, intimate accountability does wonders for people. It guards their heart against wrong action and motivation. Another note of practical application is that your personal sin is poison to the church. This is why it is so integral that the church be a help to those caught in a fault. It can halt and thwart the efforts of the church to win the world to Christ. We note its seriousness by seeing what God did about it. And we should have a deep commitment to the purity of the church and the accountability process.

## B. **The Discipline of God (v. 5-10)**

1. This is the part that people have such difficulty with. God striking down this couple one at a time, not even giving them a chance to repent. God dealt this sin swiftly to demonstrate His character and the expectations of a disciple of Jesus. Sin demands punishment from a holy God. There is nothing to indicate that these two weren't genuine believers. But usually people have a hard time saying that sometimes God uses death to remove sinning believers. But this is the clear teaching of scripture. And it goes to show how serious it is to claim Christ and willfully, rebelliously sin.
2. Eccl 8:11, 1 Cor 5:5, 11:30-32, 1 John 5:16, Lev 10:1-2, 2 Sam 6:7, 12:15,
3. **Illustration:** Am I becoming more and more in love with God as a holy God, or with the conception of an amiable being who says, "Oh, well, sin doesn't matter much."? –Oswald Chambers, **The natural response when someone confronts us is to deny the sin and to be angry at the accuser.** "To ask that God's love should be content with us as we are, is to ask that God should cease to be God: because He is what He is, His love must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled by certain stains in our present character, and because He already loves us He must labor to make us lovable. We cannot even wish, in our better moments, that He could reconcile Himself to our present impurities--no more than the beggar maid could wish that King Cophetua should be content with her rags and dirt, or a dog, once having learned to love man, could wish that man were such as to tolerate in his house the snapping, verminous, polluting creature of the wild pack. What we would here and now call our "happiness" is not the end God chiefly has in view: but when we are such as He can love without impediment, we shall in fact be happy." –C. S. Lewis, **the pastor telling about the seven men that were making life hell at the church, but determined to stay, they prayed, and he preached six funerals over the next year, and the final man left.**
4. We must not get so comfortable with Rom 8:1 that we get comfortable with sin. Part of the reason that we are bothered by this is that it is hard to conceive of a God who would kill His children over sin. But what we fail to understand about God's character is not His willingness to remove sinning believers, but the depth of the offense of any sin that we commit. It's a misplaced locus of amazement. The question that we should ask is what restrains God from annihilating us all right now. It is mercy for us, and mercy on Ananias and Sapphira that God removed them so quickly and didn't permit their sin to slowly denigrate their whole lives, ruining not only the church, but their own personal lives then dying. And if this happened it would be fair to ask if they were not truly believers, because there was no chastisement. We should have a healthy fear of the consequences of our sin. Fear is not a "bad" feeling. It alerts us to the dangers of sin.

### C. **The Reputation of the Church (v. 11-16)**

1. This is another picture that we have of the church following an event (similar to the end of Acts 2 & 4). And again, we see amazing things. You might think that the discipline of God upon a sinning church member and his wife would stifle things a bit, but note the results. 1) Great fear. The church was reminded about God's hatred of sin, and their reaction was to be afraid for themselves. 2) Great signs and wonders. The removal of sin from the body only intensified its ability to minister, especially in the miraculous. 3) Unity. Disunity is always caused by sin, and therefore its removal brought about unity in a committed body of believers. 4) Understanding of membership outside the church, but respect. This is an amazing paradox—unbelievers were scared to become church members, although at the same time they greatly respected them. Outsiders knew that being a Christian and a church member was a grave responsibility and not one to be entered into lightly or half-heartedly. And so, the nominal, superficial, half-hearted ones did not "come near." But even those scared to commit respected the church greatly. 5) Evangelism and commitment to the Lord and His church. Not only that, but there were those who could no longer refuse to believe, and so they did, and the church grew. So, in spite of fear, some still committed their lives to Jesus. 6) Physical healing and demonic deliverance. The reputation grew so much so, that people from many towns would line the streets and bring their loved ones hoping to be healed by Peter's shadow.
  2. Jer 32:40, Acts 19:17, 1 Pet 1:17, Rev 15:4, 2 Cor 11:1-2, Eph 5:27,
  3. Illustration: this is one of the main reasons that we have cleaned out our church roll in recent months, and will continue to do so in coming months—a purified biblical church will grow. "We read not that Christ ever exercised force but once, and that was to drive profane ones out of his temple, and not to force them in." —John Milton, Billy Graham stated to the Conference of Itinerant Evangelists that when he began to preach about the Lordship of Christ and committing your life to him, he saw an increase in the proportion of people that came. Thom Rainer wrote a book called High Expectations which statistically demonstrated that churches with high expectations actually grow faster and retain more than those with no standards. "The church pays a steep price for disobeying the Lord's clear teaching on this matter. The impure, worldly church that is the inevitable result of the absence of confrontive holiness will not be an effective witness for Jesus Christ." —MacArthur,
  4. You would think this would slow the growth of the church, but it was the opposite. The church, once purified, began to grow in leaps and bounds. In fact, they stop using numbers; it is just "multitudes" now. They experienced a revival! Our first reaction to discipline should not be questioning the process, the bible, and the character of God; we should be carefully examining our own lives. Church purity will enable us to minister better, be more unified, and grow. It will also begin to recapture the biblical picture of a church being the bride without spot and blemish to us; and it will show a watching world that unlike, politics, sports, government, and business, there are still a few organizations that have standards. And accountability to those standards is productive and helpful and biblical.
- A. Closing illustration: a story of a Hassidic rabbi, renowned for his piety. He was unexpectedly confronted one day by one of his devoted youthful disciples. In a burst of feeling, the young disciple exclaimed, "My master, I love you!" The ancient teacher looked up from his books as asked his fervent disciple, "Do you know what hurts me, my son?" The young man was puzzled. Composing himself, he stuttered, "I don't understand your question, Rabbi. I am trying to tell you how much you mean to me, and you confuse me with irrelevant questions." "My question is neither confusing nor irrelevant," rejoined the rabbi. "For if you do not know what hurts me, how can you truly love me?"
- B. Recap
- C. Invitation to commitment

#### Additional Notes

- **Is Christ Exalted, Magnified, Honored, and Glorified?**