



The Deception of Ananias and Sapphira

Acts 4:32-5:11

By Pastor Paul Hudson

Mar. 1st, 2026

**This original sermon was not written by A.I.*

We're going through the book of Acts, in our series, "Church Afire!" and we've come to chapter 4:32-5:11, Ananias and Sapphira. By now the early church in Jerusalem was in a period of rapid and sustained growth, and they experienced the grace of God so much that they began to share all their possessions with one another. They considered whatever they had as if it belonged to the whole church and especially to those in need. *Mii Casa es su Casa*. I experienced this kind of expectation of possession sharing when I first went overseas to the mission field. I have to tell you, I wasn't really prepared for it.

When I moved to Thailand, I brought my bass guitar over along with my other guitars. The team I joined was heavily involved in worship music ministry and the one instrument they were missing was the bass guitar. When one of the leaders heard that I had brought over a bass guitar, she yelled with joy, "we have a bass guitar!" I was kind of looking at her like— "I have a bass guitar... and... you can borrow it ... I guess." I felt like saying, "Not to be stingy... but... you know, I left everything, my career, my family, my friends, my truck— all I have are my guitars... I mean definitely, I brought these to bless the ministry but... you're gonna have to pry them from my cold dead fingers..."

No, I'm kidding- the truth is, yeah, my guitars ended up getting shared with very talented Thais on our team who didn't have their own. I did that out of a desire to bless those who were in need when I was in the position to bless, not out of being coerced to do so. And I think that's an important distinction for the church to understand about sharing possessions— the Lord never coerces his people into giving or sharing. He encourages us to give, but he never coerces.

The passage this morning tells quite a scary story. Many preachers will not even attempt to give a sermon on this. What lies at the heart of the story is deception and fraud in response to God's abundant grace. Right now, we are in a time where deception is at its highest point ever in the history of the world. AI has not only blurred the lines of what is real and what isn't, but it can replace reality all together. As well, fraud has advanced to epic proportions. With the painful theft caused by rampant deception and fraud these days, the church has the opportunity to stand out as light in the darkness with honesty, integrity, and reality. We have the opportunity to show the world what a graciously loving, sharing, and giving community looks like.

Let's open the Bible to Acts 4:32-5:11.

Scripture: Acts 4:32-5:11

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who

owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

5 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.

2 With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4 Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. 6 Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

9 Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ac 4:32–5:11.

The Word of God for the People of God.

At the beginning of this passage, we can see the early church was becoming a beautiful example of a loving community that cared deeply for their own. We shouldn't let the story of Ananias and Sapphira change that perception. We'll get to them in a moment.

Starting off, Vs. 32 says they were one in heart and mind. That's quite a statement! American culture is so deeply individualistic and full of division, it's hard to fathom being in a community of people with one heart and one mind. We're all so different. Even in this church. Yes, we are like-minded in that we share the same Christian faith and worship the same God, but that's pretty much where the similarities end for a lot of us. We all have different views about life, and if each of us pushed our differences on one another, the church would probably fall apart. That is where God's grace and protection comes in.

For our church to continue on, the grace of God needs to work through us toward one another. We can see God's grace at work now, but in the very first church, his grace worked in such powerful and tangible ways that the early Christians could not deny the riches of his presence. The obvious presence of God was the very reason why they were able to love and freely share their possessions with each other. God was their provider; there was no doubt about that!

Two keys to understanding Ananias and Sapphira

As we look into this story about Ananias and Sapphira, there are two keys we need to understand about God's grace working in the early church. One, as I just said, God's grace was so powerfully and clearly at work that no true believer could deny it.

In fact, verse 33 gives us a pretext for understanding why Ananias and Sapphira's punishment was so severe: "And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them." His powerful grace is what brought them together. His powerful grace is what led them to share their possessions with one another. His powerful grace is what led them to be of one mind and one heart, and it was by his powerful grace that they were able to put aside their differences and love each other. God's grace was so powerfully at work within them all that the riches of his presence could not be denied. To oppose his gracious work was the same as rejecting God to his face. That's the first key.

The second key is that this was a crucial time in church history for laying the foundation of the Christian faith. Foundations were being laid by God that would form his church worldwide for centuries to come. Just as God did with the early Israelites, he showed up clearly and powerfully such that his people were left without excuse. The first Christians had a greater responsibility to work with him in forming the foundations of truth. As partners with God, they had a much greater responsibility to recognize and deal with deception.

When we think about deception in the church today, we might think about individuals misunderstanding or misapplying the word of God. Wise church leaders are simply called upon to correct misunderstandings and misapplications. Well, this deception from Ananias and Sapphira was not a result of deficient human understanding that simply needed corrected by a wise pastor. It was the infiltration of the devil seeking to destroy the very first church.

In that time, the infiltration of spiritual deception was the result of one thing, a heart given over to the devil. God was very careful to not allow spiritual deception to penetrate the first church. In fact many of the New Testament letters deal with exposing frauds and false teachings. Demonic spiritual deception threatened the survival of the early church.

The early Israelites had the same responsibility to vigilantly guard against deception. Joshua 7 parallels Ananias and Sapphira. As the Israelites were about to embark on a new era by entering the promised land, some of them were unfaithful with the devoted things. They took some of what was meant to be devoted to the Lord and kept them as their own. When they went out to conquer the land, their army was decimated. So Joshua fell down on his face before the Lord and cried out, "why did you even bring us here only to destroy us?" The Lord said, "Israel has sinned and violated my covenant, for they have taken some of the devoted things..." and the Lord said, "they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions." And the scariest part is that God said he would no longer be with them to make them victorious until they destroyed those possessions and the ones who took them. So, Joshua did what the Lord commanded, and the Lord brought them into the promised land. These two stories are very similar. Both happened while the Lord was bringing his people into a new era with new foundations being laid, where his presence and power were on full display.

So, two keys to understanding this: one, God's grace worked powerfully and tangibly in the first church; and two, it was a crucial time in church history, a new era for laying the foundations of the Christian faith.

The Barnabas Factor

Now, one more factor to mention before we get to Ananias and Sapphira: the Barnabas factor. At the end of chapter 4, we see that there were some in the church who sold their property and brought the money to the apostles. And one is mentioned by name, Barnabas. This man is seen throughout the book of acts as a very giving and helpful person. He was an influential leader of the church. He sold his land and brought 100% of the money to the apostles. He was very generous and well respected in the church. His name might have been etched in the walls of the Christian house churches. Ananias and Sapphira were witnesses to his generosity, influence, and fame in the church. Undoubtedly, they saw his power, and they saw an opportunity to gain this kind of fame for themselves.

Ananias and Sapphira's Deception

In Ch. 5, Ananias sold a piece of property, most likely inspired by Barnabas' act. However, Ananias kept part of the profit for himself. He brought what was left to the apostles. And Peter immediately said, "how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you've lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?" And here's the important part— he said, "you have not lied just to human beings but to God."

Immediately, Ananias fell down and died. When his wife came three hours later, Peter asked her about the price, she confirmed. She lied, rather, about the total price. Peter said to her, "how could you test the Spirit of the Lord?" and she fell down and died.

Now, if this is the first time you've heard the story, you might be thinking did I hear this right? Did God just kill two people after they gave money to the church? What kind of God is this? Or maybe some of you are scrambling to revise your pledge cards.

Giving to the Church is Never Through Coercion.

Let me say first that the story is not meant to support coercion. No pastor, no church should ever use the scripture to scare people into giving to the church. If you misunderstand the scripture and the story, you might think it was put there to scare early Christians into giving all they have to give. Don't interpret the story that way. Giving to the church is only and always about the grace of God working through you.

Remember the two keys I gave you. One, this was a time that God's grace was working extraordinarily and undeniably through the apostles and the first church. Two, this was a crucial time in that the first church was just getting started. The devil was seeking to infiltrate and destroy it from the inside through lies and deception. So what is the story about?

Ananias and Sapphira Lied About the Price of the Land.

The scripture tells us exactly what it's about. Ananias and Sapphira blatantly lied to the apostles because they were filled with the devil instead of the Spirit, and they did not trust in the grace of God. They lied about the how much they sold the land for. They told the apostles they sold the land for this amount when they really sold it for much more than that; they held back a portion for themselves. This wasn't about keeping some of the money in a sale that even Peter said was rightfully theirs.

Ananias and Sapphira Made a Vow to Give All the Money from the Sale to the Church.

This was about making a vow to the church and to God to sell their property and give all the money from the sale to the church. Such an act would've put them in a place of honor in the eyes of the church and the apostles. They were seeking to gain the power and influence that Barnabas had gained by doing such an honorable act, but such power and influence would have been gained through deception. Whatever position of honor they were seeking in the church would have been built on lies and deception. Essentially, they sought to gain power in the first church through a godly vow that was actually a demonic fraud.

They Trampled on God and Made a Mockery of His Grace.

When you consider the grace of God that was working so powerfully in the early church, this was like trampling all over God. It was making a mockery of God and taking advantage of the church for personal gain. They pretended to be righteous and full of faith in front of the church when in reality their supposed righteous and faith-filled act was tainted by fraudulence. And it goes deeper than that.

They Were Filled with Satan Instead of the Holy Spirit.

Peter asked Ananias, “how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you lied to the Holy Spirit?” And he said to Sapphira, “how could you conspire with your husband to test the Holy Spirit.” My friends, this was not a mere lapse in judgment. It went much deeper than poor judgment. This was about Ananias and Sapphira giving their hearts over to the devil rather than being filled with the Holy Spirit. In spite of receiving the abundant grace of God, they sought honor through fraud, and power through deception. This was a work of Satan in their hearts taking the place of God’s gracious work of the Spirit.

To finish, how should we respond to this story? Well, this is a story about deception and fraud in response to God’s grace. And it warns us to not be filled with satanic greed, but to be filled with the Holy Spirit. So, here are three responses to consider.

1. **Let God’s grace lead you to his truth, not to a fraudulent life.** God’s grace is not a license to live a double life, but a gift that leads us into his holy presence.
2. **Consider carefully what is vowed to God and be truthful with integrity if you cannot perform your vows.** Ananias and Sapphira would have been fine if they were simply truthful about what they had sold the land for. The church today may not have people dying on the spot whenever they deceitfully break a vow, thank God, but the Lord does take vows seriously. He will hold back his blessing or even his presence when deceitful vows are made to him.
3. **Be filled with the Holy Spirit and guard against the devil’s lies and deceit.** The heart that bends to the Holy Spirit is a heart that opposes the devil. A Spirit-filled heart will resist the devil before his schemes ever have a chance to hatch.

Let’s pray.

Study Questions
Read Acts 4:32-5:11

Observation Questions (*What does the text say?*)

1. What did all the believers in the early church have in common according to Acts 4:32-35?
2. Who was Barnabas, and what was his notable action?
3. What specific actions did Ananias and Sapphira take after selling their property?
4. How did Peter describe Ananias' actions and their spiritual implications?

Interpretation Questions (*What does the text mean?*)

1. Why do you think God's grace was so powerfully at work in the early church? Hard question: Do you think his grace is less powerfully at work now or even more powerfully at work?
2. What significance does God's judgment on Ananias and Sapphira hold for the early church foundation?
3. How does the act of sharing possessions correlate with the unity of heart and mind?
4. What role might Barnabas' example have played in Ananias and Sapphira's actions?

Application Questions (*How should we respond?*)

1. How can the early church's example of sharing inspire our church community?
2. In what ways can we ensure honesty and transparency in our personal and church finances?
3. What steps can we take to encourage integrity within our church leadership?
4. How might we discern when we are being led by the Spirit versus being tempted by Satan's deceit?