

“Removing the Masks!”

Acts 5 (5:1-11)

Intro. – Hans Christian Andersen wrote a classic entitled *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. It deals with an emperor who has an obsession with clothes. One day two shysters came to town. They claimed to be “weavers of the most exquisite stuff imaginable.” Not only were their colors and patterns uncommonly beautiful, but the clothes that were made of “the stuff” had the peculiar property of becoming invisible to every person who was unfit for the office they held, or who was exceptionally foolish.

You know the rest of the story. The emperor thought with such clothes he would be able to distinguish wise men from foolish men; so, he ordered some “stuff” to be woven for him, paying the swindlers a handsome sum.

The shysters set up two looms and pretended to be weaving. No one was about to admit they were the foolish ones, even though they saw nothing in the looms. Everyone, including the emperor saw nothing, though every one went on about how exquisite the “stuff” was. The swindlers held up the imaginary product. Nobody saw anything because there was nothing to see. The emperor removed all his clothing to put on the imaginary clothes. He paraded before the whole town, buck naked. It wasn’t until a little girl said out loud, “But he has nothing on!” that the emperor was shocked into reality “for he had suspicion the child was right” says book.

Want to use this to introduce our text. It has been suggested that “Half the misery in the world comes from trying to LOOK instead of trying to BE what one is not.” The term Jesus gave to this practice is *upokritas* = wearing the mask or playing the actor. Hypocrisy is deliberate deception. Such was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. God took the lives of these two people because they lied – lied to men and most importantly to God!

Purpose: *to better understand that God cannot be fooled*

If you and I are serious about getting back to the basics, all masks must be removed – truth and righteousness must prevail. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira will teach us much if we let it. Three matters are given in this text which tell us how and why we must remove all masks and that God cannot be fooled:

I Sin is Energized by SATAN

A. God Has Always Judged Sin Severely

1. Just after the tabernacle set up – Nadab and Abihu offered up *strange fire* before the Lord (Lev. 10) resulting in God consuming them with fire...
2. Joshua 7 – Achan killed by God for disobeying orders given concerning the plunder of Jericho...
3. 2 Samuel 6 – Uzzah put his hand out to steady ark (a clear violation of God’s instructions) = God struck him down dead...
4. Obviously God is NOT responsible for these who sinned, but, He did use their sin as warnings (1 Corinthians 10:10-12) to Israel AND to us!
5. Ananias and Sapphira sinned... God used them as a warning... to us as well!

B. Satan Seeks to Defeat Christians

1. If he can’t defeat church from without, he will attack from within...
2. Satan tempted A & S to put on a mask – to LOOK like Christians rather than BE Christians...
3. Temptation is prevalent today – so many churches falling for the seeker sensitive movement – looking relevant... inoffensive... looking for what people want instead of what they need....
4. Our concern is not *look like the church*, our concern is *to be the church* (genuine, biblical, faithful)

C. Satan is the Father of Lies

1. Oliver Wendell Holmes: “Sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle which fits them all.”
2. Satan is a liar and murderer – John 8:44 says, “*You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies.*”
3. Satan lied to and through A & S = it was their choice to follow Satan’s lies which led to their death (cf James 1:13-15).

- a. so when God judged A & S He was letting you and me know that He, God will not tolerate deception in His Son's Church.
- b. why so important we learn to *drop the masks* in the Church – politics must go (i.e. abandon individual agendas and seek the Lord's purpose ALONE!)
- c. Christian courtesy must reign rather than person preferences... -- favoritism is out and genuine care and concern is in!

It has been said: "The mask, given time, comes to be the face itself." This is Satan's desire and explains why he energizes sin!

II Sin is Motivated by PRIDE

- at the very base of A & S's choice was their pride:

A. Three Matters Involved with All Sin

1. Knowledge of God's will = sin is going contrary to God's will whether by commission/omission.
2. Also involved is Satan's planting of the thought(s).
 - a. v 3 "*filled your heart*" = planting the thought comes from Satan
 - b. certainly A & S had Satan plant the thought BUT the "why" of "why has Satan filled your heart" makes clear resistance to temptation was possible... it was their choice!
 - c. they chose to allow temptation to take root...
3. Also involved is the will of the individual who submits to the temptation (v 4) – in A & S's case PRIDE is in the forefront of their decision to lie to the Holy Spirit.

B. Reputation Over Character

- Illus. – a wealthy eccentric woman went to buy a dog: "I want a dog of which I can be proud. Does that one have a good pedigree?" she asked. "O, yes," said the kennel owner, "If he could talk, madam, he wouldn't speak to either of us."
- 1. It was pride that took "Lucifer" (angel of God) and transformed him into Satan (Isaiah 14:12-15)
- 2. It was pride that took Adam and Eve to reversing roles and going against God's will...
- 3. Pride opens the door to every sin – How? – once we are more concerned with our reputation than our character, no end to things we'll do just to make ourselves look good...
- 4. Exactly what A & S did:
 - a. sold land = note: they didn't have to give anything...
 - b. BUT when they saw what Barnabas did = wanted recognition of man by trying lie to God!
- 5. Point: anytime reputation takes precedence over character = Pride at the base, ultimately = sin!

Remove the masks of reputation and let's concern ourselves with character before a holy/righteous God!

III Sin is Directed at HIS CHURCH

A. Christ Loves His Church

1. Ephesians 5:25 "*Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*"
2. Christ loves and is righteously jealous for His Bride...
3. What would have happened had A & S been permitted to be influential in the church? = disaster!
4. Why "church discipline" is so necessary:
 - a. greatest proof parents lack in their love for kids is to let them do what *they want to do*... likewise the same is true for the brethren of the church...
 - b. great love for Christ means great love for His people = discipline = restoring...

B. Satan Seeks to Destroy

1. The Church is God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16) and Satan seeks to move in and control her!
2. The Church is God's Army (2 Timothy 2:1-4) and Satan seeks to get as many traitors in the ranks as he can possibly get...
3. The more masks Satan can encourage us to put on, the more influence and destruction he'll have.

C. Time for Self-Examination

1. Ananias was dead and buried and Sapphira didn't know – note: Satan always keeps his servants in the dark!
2. Peter's question gave her an opening to take off the mask (repent) BUT she chose to cont. the lie.
3. A & S tested God's Spirit = i.e. dared God to act and act He did!
- "If God removed hypocrites today in the Church like He did in Acts 5, how many would be left?"
4. Point: time to examine our lives, motives, intentions:
 - a. are we living up to the name *Christian*?
 - b. are we crucifying ourselves daily, taking up our cross and following Him?
 - c. are we putting Him first before all and everything?
5. Jesus talking to the Pharisees and scribes in Matthew 15:17-19 *"Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those define the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."*

Conclusion: Can God be fooled? Can we "pull the wool" over God's eyes? Is it possible to do anything without God knowing or noticing it? He Who has the hairs of our head numbered, Who knows the falling of a sparrow, Who knows us better than we know ourselves, can He be fooled!

**Ananias and Sapphira
got together to conspire,
a plot! To cheat!
The Lord and get ahead.
They knew God's power...didn't fear it...
tried to cheat the Holy Spirit...
went into the temple and
they both dropped dead!**

**Hey!
God loves a cheerful giver,
Give it all you got!
He loves to hear you laughing
When you're in a an awful spot...
So when the odds are up against you
And you cannot do a thing...
Praise God! To praise Him is a glorious thing!**

Brethren and friend, it's time to remove the masks. Ananias and Sapphira leave us a vivid warning from our God. He will not be fooled!