**Deception Among God’s People**

**Acts 5:1-11 (ESV)**

February 28, 2021

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***1*** *But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,* ***2*** *and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.* ***3*** *But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?* ***4*** *While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”* ***5*** *When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.* ***6*** *The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.*

***7*** *After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.* ***8*** *And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.”* ***9*** *But Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.”* ***10*** *Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.* ***11*** *And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.*

Does your view of God include any thoughts about Him that causes you to tremble?Yes, through the blood of Jesus, we have confidence to draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith. But do you have any understandings of God that rolls a shiver of godly fear through your heart? The prophet Isaiah, when he

**Isaiah 6:1-5** saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

Does your view of God ever cause you to cry out, “Woe is me! I am unclean! I am undone, for I am a man, I’m a woman of an unclean heart and I’m standing in the presence of the King of all the earth!” Modern Christianity has so distorted God’s character that we often think we have no occasion at all to fear Him. We see Him sort of as a kindly grandfather who pats us on the head in our sins and looks the other way, unwilling to even respond to our acts of defiance.

The Holy Spirit records a number of uncomfortable stories in Scripture where God responds to man’s careless sin with immediate physical death. These stories disrupt our casual notions of God. I think of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu.

**Leviticus 10:1-2** Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.

It consumed them for simply offering strange fire; for not following worship protocol as they approached God. Fire came out of the altar and it consumed them.

**Leviticus 10:3** Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’” And Aaron held his peace.

God is saying, “I will be holy in the midst of my people!” Aaron, whose sons’ died, held his peace. He dare not speak a word. Wow!

I think of Uzzah who volunteered to help transport the ark of God back to Jerusalem in a joyful celebration. It was coming back to be united with the tabernacle for the first time in a hundred years.

**2 Samuel 6:5** And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

You can imagine the party!

**2 Samuel 6:6-8** Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God. And David was angry because the LORD had broken out against Uzzah.

David says, “I don’t understand this. This doesn’t even seem right.”

**2 Samuel 6:9** And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and he said, “How can the ark of the LORD come to me?”

I think of Achan, who took spoil at Jericho as God led Israel to their first victory in the Promised Land. Under God’s direction, Joshua responded with sober judgment upon Achan and his entire family.

**Joshua 7:24-25** And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had. And they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. And Joshua said, “Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today.”

This is the judgment of the Lord!

**Joshua 7:25-26** And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger.

Now just when we are beginning to find comfort in the “But that’s the God of the Old Testament” filter, we come toActs 5.

We’re just starting to think “that’s the way God used to respond to sin, but that’s not really the way He responds anymore,” and Luke explodes that notion by telling the story that appears in the very first chapters of the early church.

Friends, I pray that God will awaken us to a view of God so lofty, so noble so as to be worthy of Him. It’s a view of God that includes grace and righteousness. It’s a view of God where we find comfort and we tremble. It’s a view of God where we rejoice in His mercy and we mourn over our sin. The Bible provides us with such a view if we would read it. Hebrews 12 is helpful.

**Hebrews 12:25** See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

**Hebrews 12:28-29** Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

We open up our Bibles to Acts 5 and we remember that God had recently started His church on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit comes now to indwell all those people who believe in Jesus, the risen Lord and Savior. Right away, Satan is there, threatening the life of the church first through persecution. We read that in Acts 4. Satan hopes to intimidate the apostles, push back the gospel into some private sector in some private corner, muting the very public proclamation of the Christ who is able to bring salvation, able to create worshipers for this God who is worthy. It is clear from the start that this strategy of persecution is backfiring. Persecution becomes the seed of the church. The hotter the flame of persecution, the greater the fire grows of the Spirit of God in the church. Suffering for Jesus emboldens their witness. So now in Acts 5, Satan turns to a new strategy, a strategy of corrupting the church to ruin her. Persecution outside the church is a huge threat. Perversion inside the church is a greater threat. Can we understand that?In John 8, Jesus describes Satan this way. Satan

**John 8:44** does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

That’s just his nature. Every lie comes from that source. Satan used lies in Genesis 3 to tempt Adam and Eve to sin and thus bring ugly, horrible death into God’s beautiful, wonderful world. Satan uses lies to this day to carry out his design to destroy God’s people and to rob us of the hope of the Gospel. Here’s the central idea we’re going to follow this morning. All sin is a serious assault upon God’s glory. Lying is the sin that forms the foundation of man’s rebellion against God. It was there from the beginning. Lying is an abomination to the Lord. So as we think about this particular sin, the sin of deception, and it’s the sin that Ananias and Sapphira engaged in, we first want to think about

**The Pervasiveness of Deception**

In other words, deception is a problem for every person in every place. The “lie virus” is everywhere and the danger of contagion cannot be escaped. The new church is not a “safe place,” free from the concern of deception. The present day church is not a “safe place,” free from the concern of deception. God thankfully, will one day bring His people to a state where there is no more lying and no more deceit. But for now, we must fight against falsehood with the weapons God provides, the Gospel, in order to be free in God’s truth. This temptation towards falsehood sings a siren song for all of us everywhere we go. No sooner had the new church begun to reflect the glory of God in a brutal and dark world, than Satan attacks her through the temptation to deceive. What a wonderful community the Holy Spirit has produced here! Look at the end of chapter 4 again. This is truly a slice of heaven on the earth, a place of redemption, a place of hope, a place of life.

**Acts 4:32** Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

In other words, they were generous and willing to share.

**Acts 4:33** And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

The gospel was being proclaimed and through the gospel, transformation was happening.

**Acts 4:34-37** There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

So here we have this guy named Joseph who loves the Lord Jesus.His heart has been so changed by Christ that he is now a cheerful giver to the church for the glory of God. He sells a really valuable piece of property that he owns and lays it at the apostles’ feet so that the church then can do the ministry of Christ, specifically, caring for the poor in the new community. Joseph’s life then becomes an encouragement to others. They see his example and he stimulates others in the church to love Jesus in the same way. In fact, Joseph is such an encouragement in this new fledgling church to the faith of other brothers and sisters in the church, that they actually change his name. So he’s been known by Joseph all his life and people said, “No, we’re not going to call you Joseph. We’re going to call you Barnabas.” Barnabas means “son of encouragement, son of refreshment.” Everywhere he went, it was like refreshment took place, spiritual refreshment and strength just from this person.

Now I don’t know anyone in the modern church whose name has been changed because of the ministry of encouragement to their brothers and sisters in the local church. But I do know of some who every time I think of them, every time I connect with them, my first thought is “Encouragement.” Praise God for those! Whenever I talk with them, they’re just encouraging me in the Lord. They’re expressing an affirmation of love. They’re expressing an affirmation of genuine spiritual concern. They’re expressing an affirmation of confidence in Christ to resolve everything that we face. I need that. The church needs that. Praise God for the Joseph’s who become Barnabas in the church. Might we pray, “Lord please transform me to be the Barnabas in my church family”? Yet while Barnabas had a sweet influence on many in the church, Satan uses even Barnabas’ good example to bring temptation and a snare to Ananias and Sapphira.

***1*** *But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,* ***2*** *and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

We’re not told the inner thoughts specifically of this couple, but clearly God wants us to see a connection between Barnabas and between Ananias and Sapphira. Perhaps they saw how others praised Barnabas and even changed his name and they wanted to be a son of encouragement, too. They wanted to be thought of as spiritual. They wanted to be thought of as really useful and fruitful in the church. They wanted to be thought of as having as big a heart because they see how others were talking about how Barnabas’ generosity had impacted their life. They wanted Barnabas’ reputation without Barnabas’ righteousness. Interestingly, the name Ananias means “God is gracious.” The name Sapphira means “Beautiful.” But in their case their names did not match their nature. Ananias denied God’s grace through his greed and Sapphira destroyed her beauty by the blemish of her sin.

What exactly did Ananias and Sapphira do that was so wrong? It’s important to note that Ananias and Sapphira didn’t have to sell their property. That was not what righteousness required. Once they did sell it, they could have done anything with the money that they desired. It was theirs. It was personal property. Look at verses 3 and 4, where we see the core of the sin.

***3*** *But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?*

It’s lying that is the core of the sin.

***4*** *While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?*

In other words, “You could have kept it. You didn’t have to sell it.”

***4*** *And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?*

“You could have sold it and then done whatever you want with the proceeds.”

***4*** *Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”*

Their sin was lying. It was deception. In publicly claiming to have given all the proceeds from the sale of their property, they were lying to the church and worse, they were lying to God Himself, the Holy Spirit who created this church. They valued reputation above integrity, and in that, they had it all backwards. Integrity is always more valuable than reputation. Always! Can we understand that? They thought that sin would bring blessing and joy to their lives and sin never does that.

The context of Ananias and Sapphira’s temptation to lie is the sincere generosity of others in the church. Do you know that we are so sinful and our hearts are so deceived that even righteous acts can create a context of temptation for us? We must not believe that a righteous culture will keep temptation out of our family or out of our church. We must not believe that! That’s not true. “If I can get my family just right, then temptations won’t ever even invade. If we get our church right, if there is the presence of temptation that means something is really wrong.” No, that’s not true! Here, this is a wonderful church, and yet, it’s actually the righteous in the church that Satan uses to stimulate a longing for the flesh of Ananias and Sapphira. Sin is like the corona virus that we’re fighting. It seeps into every place, even the places where there are great efforts to keep it out. This is particularly true of the sin of deception. Listen to what Jeremiah says about the pervasive nature, how this temptation to deceive is everywhere.

**Jeremiah 6:13** “For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.

That’s his evaluation. From even the best of them, everyone is contaminated with this.

**Jeremiah 9:5** Everyone deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity.

Here are the applications. Lying about our sin will lead to deeper guilt and sorrow. Lying never relieves us of the weight of sin. Lying never relieves us of the burdens around us. Deception swells corruption. It swells the consequences of sin rather than subtracts from it. Here, Ananias and Sapphira thought of lying as somehow a path to blessing. Then second, humble confession of our sin to God is God’s remedy for every sin in the life of the believer. 1 John 1:9 is one of the most precious verses in all of Scripture for a good reason.

**1 John 1:9-10** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

So let’s confess our sin. Let’s be a confessing family. There is a place where we can go and find hope in the midst of our sin, where we can find freedom. We can find forgiveness. That place is right at the foot of Jesus’ cross. Come to Christ with everything. So we see the prevalence of deception. But also now

**The Provocation of Deception**

What provoked this temptation inside Ananias and Sapphira? What fed the thought that a lie would actually do them good? At some point, they talked together about it. “Let’s lie about the amount of money we received and let’s say that we gave everything to the church for the work of Christ. Let’s say that.” What provoked that?

First, circumstances. Ananias and Sapphira were in a place where others were being praised for their generosity. If they hadn’t been in such a situation, if no one was giving anything and no one was getting praised for it, they probably wouldn’t have done this. So again, it was actually righteous deeds of others that created a temptation for them to actually do something they otherwise wouldn’t have done. Circumstances! This is not to suggest that giving recognition to cheerful givers was wrong in the church. It wasn’t. It was right for the church to praise God for the generous hearts of the members and to see them as good examples. But it is to suggest that we should be aware of our circumstances and understand the specific ways that the circumstances we are presently in, how those circumstances bring about various temptations. Whatever circumstances you or I are in is a circumstance where there are specific temptations. They’re different according to circumstances, those temptations are, but there are some specific ones.

There are two students. One receives an A on an exam and the other fails the exam. Both are tempted, not with the same sin, but they’re both tempted by sin. That circumstance creates an aura of temptation. There are two couples. One has a really happy marriage and one has a really miserable marriage. Both of those are very different in their circumstances, but they’re both equally tempted by sin. They’re different sins that they’re tempted by, but they’re both tempted to sin. The idea is that whatever circumstance we’re in, there are very specific temptations that Satan will use to bring temptation our way.

Secondly is theflesh. You notice in this story where Peter asked the question in verse 4

***4*** *Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?*

He’s talking about the heart of flesh, here. The flesh is that part of us even after we’re redeemed, that still loves sin, that is still drawn to sin, still attracted to it. The Holy Spirit that resides inside believers exerts a constant conflict with the flesh that also is inside of us. So sin is not just something that is out there, that could only come in from the external. Sin is something that bubbles up inside of us. The Apostle Paul speaks about this and he says

**Galatians 5:16-17** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

They are fighting each other.

**Galatians 5:18-21** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

He has this big long list. But right in the midst of that big long list, he mentions jealousy and envy. There it is. That’s Ananias and Sapphira. We must respect the enemy that resides within us and that is us. This enemy is part of us. One day we’ll be liberated. What a day that’s going to be!

But then there is the devil. So circumstances provoke this temptation. The flesh stirs up that temptation. And then there is the devil himself.

***3*** *But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit*

You see Satan operative here. The last time we see this kind of description, remember, was in the upper room when Jesus was talking to Judas. John writes

**John 13:2** During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him,

Now, how Satan fills the heart, exactly what that is and how that happens, I don’t know. But I only know that it does happen. Satan is operative to get in us, to get in our minds, to get in our affections, to get in our will and mess with us, to control us and to motivate us away from God.

Friends, remember that Satan is a murderer and a liar. That’s his nature. That’s what Jesus says about him. The solutions he offers through sin he promises will bring us life and blessing, but those solutions that he promises will bring us life and blessing actually are poison and are designed to bring us death. It is his nature. He is selling poison as medicine. That’s what he does. And he says, “Ananias and Sapphira, you feel a little left out. You’re feeling a little bummed that other people are getting the recognition. You’re part of this church too, and nobody is acknowledging your sacrifices. Do something really great and then you’ll get the attention. Then you’ll feel like you’re part of the church. You won’t feel isolated. You won’t feel left out. Poor you! You feel lonely inside your own local church. Here’s the answer.” He knows that it’s not medicine. He could care less about bringing any blessing. He doesn’t want to bring blessing in anyone’s life. But he sells this substance of sin as medicine when he knows it’s poison, because his whole design is to rob us of the life of God so that we won’t worship Him. That’s what he does. Here’s the warning. Brothers, do not be deceived by the deceiver into deceiving!

The main source of temptation in Ananias life is Satan. That’s what Peter observes. Yes, Satan uses the circumstances. He uses Ananias’ fleshly heart, but Satan is personally working. I wonder if Ananias and Sapphira were conscious or aware of Satan’s presence in their life. I don’t think so. I don’t think we are conscious of when he is most active.Satan most often works without our awareness of his presence and that’s the reason why we need the Word of God to inform us. We need the Spirit of God to guide us.

How crafty Satan is! He uses a good behavior as a ground from which to grow dark fruit. Think of this! Is it a good thing to sell a piece of property and to give a big chunk of it? It had to be a big chunk because he was actually thinking it would sell the lie that he used all the proceeds. I don’t know what percentage it was. 50%? 75%? 80%? I don’t know. But it had to be a big chunk in order to be a lie worth believing. Is it a good thing to sell a piece of property and give a huge chunk of it to the church to help the poor? Yes, that’s a really good thing if it’s from a heart of faith. If it’s not from a heart of faith, it’s a really bad thing. It actually is a corrupting thing. It’s a thing that destroys rather than builds. It is in the midst of this good act, selling a field and giving a whole bunch of money to the church to help the poor, that Satan is behind the scenes working to rob God of His glory.

Friends, it’s important for us to know that Satan does not only use evil behaviors to gain a foothold in the life of a believer and in the life of the whole church. But Satan uses good behaviors to gain a foothold, too. He’s always looking for an advantage in our life and in our church.

Furthermore, and this is just an aside; I wish I had time to follow this. Ananias and Sapphira seemed to have a happy marriage. Marriage is designed by God to have a sanctifying influence in our lives. Men, can you say “amen” to that? Can I say that again? Marriage is designed by God to have a sanctifying influence in our lives. (Congregation: Amen!) Alright! There we go. We learn about our selfishness. We have sort of a mirror partner that can pray for us and show us the Word and encourage us and sometimes correct us and help us. It’s designed by God to be a sanctifying thing. But do you know that a happy marriage can be used by Satan to corrupt us? Did you know that? I think these folks are pretty happy together. They seem happy together. But they were not happy in the Lord. And now they actually, like Adam and Eve, the first couple, that happy relationship where they had this great influence on each other was used to bring about a corruption rather than a correction.

Some believe that a happy marriage is assuredly a mark of godliness. Do you know it is possible to have a happy marriage and have Satan control that marriage? You see, Satan doesn’t really care if for a little while or a long while, whether we’re happy or sad. What he really cares about is that we do not glorify God. That’s the thing he cares about most because he wanted God’s glory for himself and he is angry that God is glorified anywhere. He says, “That should be my glory.” That’s what he is about.

Here’s the application. Put on the full armor of God. Be ready for Satan’s assault upon your life. It’ll come! Be ready for Satan’s assault upon your church. Be strong in the Lord. Peter would say

**1 Peter 5:8-9** Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith,

I wonder whether as Peter, underneath the leading of the Holy Spirit writing those words, didn’t think back to this event of Ananias and Sapphira. Satan is like a roaring lion who prowls to destroy. “I’ve seen him do it!” he’s writing. Resist him!

Secondly, love Jesus and love Jesus’ church. The reason Satan attacked Ananias and Saphira was to bring ruin to Jesus’ church. Satan hates Jesus’ church because the church is God’s instrument to bring worship of His Son.

Third, let us make Jesus the very center of our marriage. If you’re married, make Jesus the center of that relationship. In this way, we will influence one another toward worship, not away from it. Now I want to think about

**The Perversity of Deception**

***4*** *While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”*

Now, from a human standpoint, when we look at this story we might think that we could name many, many, many, many sins that are far more perverse and far more wicked than this one. I mean, couldn’t we? If we put lying about how much money you got from a field and instead of giving 100% you gave 80%, and lying about that, does that seem like in the Top Ten of a list of sins that you could create as the worst sins possible for you and for the church? Does that seem like it would even be remotely in the Top One Hundred? Probably not! It’s not on my list. Yet, it is exceedingly wicked in the eyes of the Lord. It’s exceedingly wicked in the eyes of the Holy Spirit. We agree with God when we acknowledge the dark wickedness of deceit.

**Exodus 20:16** “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

**Psalm 7:14** Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies.

That’s what a wicked man does. He gives birth to lies.

**Psalm 101:7** No one who practices deceit shall dwell in my house; no one who utters lies shall continue before my eyes.

**Proverbs 12:22** Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight.

Why is lying an abomination to the Lord? Lying opposes God’s Son. It opposes God’s Spirit. It opposes God’s Scripture. It opposes God’s sanctification. Lying opposes God’s Son.

**John 14:6** Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Lying opposes God’s Son because He’s the truth. Lying opposes God’s Spirit.

**John 16:13** When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

He’s the Spirit of truth. Lying opposes the Spirit’s very nature. Lying opposes God’s Word.

**Psalm 119:60** The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

Lying opposes God’s sanctification, His work of changing us and transforming us.

**John 17:17** Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

Satan uses lies to enslave mankind under his dominion and power to render weak and impotent the very instrument God has created to bring light into the world, the church. To lie is to willingly participate in your own enslavement. To lie is to willingly participate in the weakening of Jesus’ church.

**John 8:31-32** So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Here’s the application. Ask God for courage to walk in the truth.

**The Price of Deception**

***5*** *When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.*

What a church service it must have been!

**6** *The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.* ***7*** *After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.* **8** *And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.”* **9** *But Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?*

How is it that you could conspire this way? This is conscious. It is willful. It is decisive.

*Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.”* **10** *Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.* **11** *And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.*

Let me ask you, is it a good thing that great fear comes upon the whole church? Is that a good thing? When we hesitate to answer that question, we betray how far from Scripture our view of God has drifted. The fear of God came upon the whole church. It is a hard thing. It’s not a light and airy thing. It’s a crushing thing. But it is an exceedingly good thing.

**Hebrews 10:30-31** For we know him who said,…“The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

How might we evaluate the fruit of a church gathering, like whether it was good or bad? A lot of us evaluate on the basis of what I’ll call enthusiastic things; excitement, energy, joy. All these things are good and all these things are proper in the worship of God’s people. But let me ask you, if someone said, “I went to church today and I was nearly crushed by it. I left so, so, so afraid.” We would say, “Oh, wait a minute! That’s not right. Wait a second! Time out! You left afraid? That’s not of God.” Twice Peter mentions it. Because of Ananias and Sapphira, fear came upon the whole church. And if you didn’t get it, he says great fear came upon the whole church, and that was a good thing.

There are two applications. Let us fear God even as we love Him. Let us lean in and toward thoughts of God that cause us to tremble. And secondly, let us tell the truth. Let us reject all forms of lying. What are those forms? There are many. There are too many to mention, but I’ll just mention a few by way of example. There are half truths. Those things where we say, “Yes, I told the truth, but I didn’t tell the whole truth.” There are exaggerations. They are somewhat connected to truth, but a little bit bigger, a little bit broader. There are what we call little harmless lies, little white lies. They are things that we think don’t seem to make a difference. “Is your mom home?” “No, tell her I’m not home.” There are unkept promises. “I’m going to do this,” only we fail and a promise becomes a lie. There is evasion where we’re trying to get around or ignore the truth There is excuse making. Tell the truth! Reject every form of lying.

I want to close by asking, what is your relationship with the truth? The truth is not so much a thing as it is a person.

**John 14:6** Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Our relationship with the truth begins with a relationship with Jesus. And our relationship with the truth continues as we abide in Jesus. So what is your relationship with the truth? If the fruit of our life begins to show falsehood, it tells us the roots aren’t planted in Jesus, who is the truth. If we see that, then the answer is that I need to deepen my roots in Jesus because when I have my feet and my faith firmly planted in Christ, He brings about a truth from the inside out that covers my life and allows the church to be a worshiping people.