

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely

ACTS 5:31-32

“Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him.”

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Lesson #21

COMMENTARY ON: 5:1-11

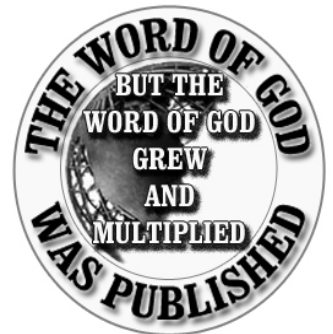
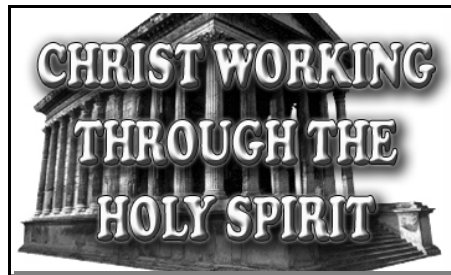
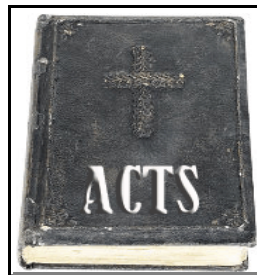
THE CASE OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

In this text we are introduced to a pair that sharply contrasted with Barnabas, who sold some land and gave the proceeds to the apostles for distribution. Here is a couple who appeared outwardly to follow the example of Barnabas, yet did not have his heart. In fact, they had made their hearts available to the devil himself. This is the first recorded sin within the church, and it is traced back to the working of Satan himself. Because of the time and nature of the sin, it will be judged quickly and harshly, lest it spread further contamination within the body of Christ. Here we will be exposed to the deadly nature of sin, even though it might appear mild, with no danger of harming others – like the first sin in Eden. It will also be made quite clear how sin in any form is viewed from heaven. Additionally, we will obtain a perspective of the dispatch with sin is to be addressed. This whole matter could never have been detected according to appearance. It had to be revealed by God – and it was.

ACTS 17:26-27

“And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us.”

“ . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

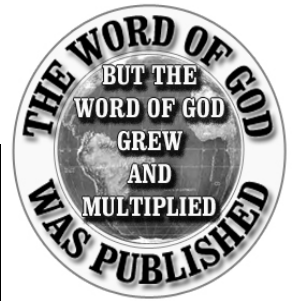


Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Book of Acts

Lesson Number 21



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ALT = Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible (1965), ASV = American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA = Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV = English Revised Version (1885), ESV = English Stand Version (2001), GNB = Good News (1966), GWN = God's Word (1995), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV = King James Version (1611), L.ITV = **Literal Translation of the Bible** ((1976), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MKJV = Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB = New American Bible (2002), NASB = New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU = New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB = New International Bible, NIV = New International Version (1984), NJB = New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV = New King James Version (1979), NLT =New Living Translation (1996), NRSV = New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV = Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK = JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster = The Webster Bible (1833), WEYMOUTH = Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE = Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE = Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862).

----- *Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification* -----

LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

THE CASE OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

“ 5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, 2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it, at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? 4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. 5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. 6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. 7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. 8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. 9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. 10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. 11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.” (Acts 5:1-11)

INTRODUCTION

In this text we are introduced to a pair that sharply contrasted with Barnabas, who sold some land and gave the proceeds to the apostles for distribution. Here is a couple who appeared outwardly to follow the example of Barnabas, yet did not have his heart. In fact, they had made their hearts available to the *old serpent*. This is the first recorded sin within the church, and it is traced back to the working of Satan himself. Because of the

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example- by Given O. Blakely

CONTENTS

- **A CERTAIN MAN AND HIS WIFE (5:1-2)**
- **SATAN FILLS HIS HEART, AND ANANIAS LIES TO THE HOLY SPIRIT (5:3)**
- **IT WAS THEIR'S, AND THEY COULD DO WHAT THEY WANTED (5:4a)**
- **SIN WAS CONCEIVED IN THE HEART, AND THE LIE WAS TO GOD (5:4b)**
- **ANANIAS DIES AND IS BURIED (5:5-6)**
- **SAPPHIRA IS QUESTIONED (5:7-8)**
- **AGREEING AND TEMPTING THE SPIRIT (5:9-10)**
- **FEAR FALLS UPON THE CHURCH (5:11)**
- **CONCLUSION**

time and nature of the sin, it will be judged quickly and harshly, lest it spread further contamination within the body of Christ. Here we will be exposed to the deadly nature of sin, even though it might appear mild, with no danger of harming others – like the first sin in Eden. It will also be made quite clear how sin in any form is viewed from heaven. Additionally, we will obtain a perspective of the dispatch with which sin is to be addressed. This whole matter could never have been detected according to appearance. It had to be revealed by God – and it was.

This is the second attack against the church. The first was from without – by the Temple authorities and the Sanhedrin. The second is from within the church, through a weak section of the body. In this we are being exposed to the devil's malicious attack against the people of God. This attack is depicted in the Revelation, in which the aggressiveness and the wrath of Satan is accentuated.

THE APOCALYPTIC GOSPEL

The Revelation contains the apocalyptic Gospel. The word

“apocalyptic” means a revelation that is contained in a figure that is threatening and pernicious. In the depiction of revelation, Satan is seen as attempting to destroy Christ, but being frustrated in his effort. He is then declared to have been cast out of heaven into the earth, experiencing Divine indignation. Then, he is also set forth as launching an aggressive initiative against the church of God, which is provided a haven of protection from his wrath.

- ⇨ **THE TWO PARTIES IN CONFLICT.** First, the two parties in conflict are set before us. *“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars”* (Rev 12:1). This is Israel in particular, and is set forth in a figure quite similar to that of a dream given to Joseph in his youth (Gen 37:9). *“And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth . . .”* (Rev 12:3-4). This is a portrayal of the devil, after his insurrection in heaven, during which a vast host of angels *“kept not their first estate”* (Jude 1:6).
- ⇨ **THE WOMAN IS TO BRING FORTH A CHILD.** The woman (Israel) is depicted as about to bring forth a child, which refers to the Messiah. *“And she being with child cried, traveling in birth, and pained to be delivered”* (Rev 12:2). This is the primary reason for God raising up Israel. It was the nation out of which the Savior of the world would come forth.
- ⇨ **SATAN STANDS READY TO DEVOUR THE CHILD.** Having lost his position in heaven, Satan now endeavors to stop

the entrance of the Savior into the world. *“ . . . and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her Child as soon as it was born”* (Rev 12:4). This initiative accounts for the slaughter of the innocents by Pharaoh (Ex 1:22; Acts 7:19), the string of barren women in the Messianic lineage (Gen 11:30; SARAH 25:21; REBEKAH 29:31 RACHEL), and the slaughter of the infants by Herod (Matt 2:16).

- ⇨ **THE MESSIAH WAS BROUGHT FORTH.** The Christ of God was born in spite of Satan's efforts. He completed His ministry upon earth, taking away the sins of the world in His death, and justifying men by His resurrection. He then ascended into heaven without the slightest setback by Satan. *“And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to His throne”* (Rev 12:5). Thus, the prophesied purpose of God was brought to completion in exacting precision.
- ⇨ **THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE PROTECTED FROM THE DEVIL.** In the interim between Christ's ascension and His appointed return to gather the saints, the people of God are provided a hiding place from the wrath of the devil. *“And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days”* (Rev 12:6). The specified period is figurative of the time during which the church is targeted by the devil for persecution and destruction (Rev 11:2-3; 12:14; 13:12). 1,260 days, 42 months, and time, times, and half a time (3 ½ years) all refer to the same period of

Once Jesus had entered into the true holy place, and obtained eternal redemption for humanity (Heb 9:12), there as no further basis for Satan's accusations. With an Intercessor in heaven, the accuser was cast out.

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example— by Given O. Blakely

time – a time of affliction and opposition (1260/30=42 months; 42/12=3 ½).

⇒ **WHEN JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, AND THE RECONCILIATION WAS FINALIZED, SATAN WAS EXPELLED.** Once Jesus had entered into the true holy place, and obtained eternal redemption for humanity (Heb 9:12), there as no further basis for Satan's accusations. With an Intercessor in heaven, the accuser was cast out. *"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not: neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him"* (Rev 12:7-9). This was a permanent expulsion, for the redemption was an eternal one.

and the absolute frustration of the devil. A just basis for remission had not been provided that not even the devil himself could contest.

⇒ **VICTORY OVER THE DEVIL IS NOW EXPERIENCED BY THE PEOPLE OF GOD.** Now, because of the purging of the conscience and the experience of Divine power, the people of God can triumph over their enemy. *"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death"* (Rev 12:11). Both the expression ("word of their testimony") and the character ("loved not their lives unto the death") become the means of the saints overcoming the devil.

⇒ **THE HEAVENS REJOICE, BUT DANGER REMAINS IN THE WORLD.** Although Satan has been expelled from heaven, he has increased his activity upon the earth, which is now a

Satan was caught off guard, and, speaking as a man, had to re-group. As soon as he gathered his diabolical composure, he leveled an attack against the people of God with whom the Messiah was associated. This includes believing Jews and Gentiles, but particularly the Jewish Christians at the first, before Gentiles were added in any significant numbers to the church. *"And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child"* (Rev 12:13).

⇒ **THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE PROTECTED FROM THE DEVIL BY MEANS OF A SPECIAL PLACE AND SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT.** Doctrinally, the people of God have been placed in the heavenly places, in which God has placed *"all spiritual blessings"* for their sustenance (Eph 1:3; 2:6). This is set forth pictorially in the Revelation. *"And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent"* (Rev 12:14).

⇒ **SATAN MAKES AN EFFORT TO GAIN ACCESS TO THE SAINTS, TO REMOVE THEM FROM THEIR SAFE HABITATION.** Although he himself has been excluded from the heavenly realms he seeks to gain access to the people of God as a whole, by means of a flood – something from the world over which he is "god" (2 Cor 4:4). *"And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood"* (Rev 12:15).

⇒ **SATAN IS UNSUCCESSFUL IN HIS EFFORTS, AS THE AGGREGATE PEOPLE GOD ARE GIVEN HELP.** Here, the people of God are considered as a whole, and the earth helps them. This is another way of portraying them as scattered, absorbed, as it were, into the nations. This makes it impossible for Satan to destroy them as a whole – as a "woman." *"And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth"* (Rev 12:16).

Satan becomes more dangerous as his anger increases. Now, since he has been defeated by the Messiah he vainly sought to destroy, he will pick up his aggression – particularly against the people of God. He knows he does not have long to work, so he will be relentless in his efforts.

⇒ **WITH SATAN'S EXPULSION FROM HEAVEN, THE DAY OF SALVATION BEGAN.** Now, with a satisfied God (Isa 53:11), the Savior seated at God's right hand, and the expulsion of the devil from the heavenly realms, salvation was brought to men, and God's kingdom was set up on earth, fulfilling Daniel's prophecy (Dan 2:44; Matt 3:2; Acts 28:23,31). *"And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night"* (Rev 12:10). Now, the Good News could be freely declared because of the satisfaction of God

danger zone. *"Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time"* (Rev 12:12). Satan becomes more dangerous as his anger increases. Now, since he has been defeated by the Messiah he vainly sought to destroy, he will pick up his aggression – particularly against the people of God. He knows he does not have long to work, so he will be relentless in his efforts.

⇒ **UPON REALIZING HIS UTTER DEFEAT, SATAN TURNS HIS ATTENTION TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD.** It appears as though

⇨ **BEING FRUSTRATED IN HIS EFFORTS TO REMOVE THE CHURCH FROM THE EARTH, SATAN TURNS HIS ATTENTION TO INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS.** Satan was not able to divert the church as a whole, as he was with Israel. Therefore, he seeks to introduce corruption through individuals who are a part of the church. *“And the dragon was wrath with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”* (Rev 12:17).

All of this is being lived out in our text. Within a short period of time, Jesus has ascended into heaven, been enthroned, and unseated principalities and powers that had enslaved humanity. He has then poured forth His Spirit. Within a few days, thousands have been added to the church. Efforts to bring the

church down working with the Sanhedrin have been dashed to the ground, as the disciples have prayed, are now speaking the word of God with unparalleled boldness, and *“great grace is upon them all.”* Satan, however, has not given up, and it is not his nature to do so.

He will now try to penetrate the ranks of believers through a person, as he did when Achan coveted the spoils of the first Israelite victory in Canaan. He saw *“a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight,”* coveted them and took them, even though he had to break the commandment of God to do so (Josh 6:18-19; 7:21). It is said of his sin, *“But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled*

against the children of Israel” (Josh 7:1). **That sin went undetected among both the leaders and the people of Israel.** As a result, an army of 3,000 Israelites were soundly defeated by an extremely small number of men from the little city of Ai, and 36 of them were killed, causing the hearts of the Israelites to *“melt”* (Josh 7:5).

Remarkably, the *“old serpent”* will use the same tactic – *“covetousness”* – in his attempt to bring down the church. In this, however, he is working with a people who are a new creation in Christ Jesus. They have been reconciled to God, and there is an abundant and free access to God, as well as the enjoyment of the *“treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* that are hidden in Christ Jesus. He will not be able to work as covertly as he did under the Old Covenant. In this case, we ought not expect the results to be the same as they were with Israel.

A CERTAIN MAN AND HIS WIFE

“^{5:1} But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, ² And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it, at the apostles' feet.”

The time is at the beginning of the New Covenant period, in which the saved were occupying new territory – the *“heavenly places.”* The circumstance is much like that of Israel when they began its occupation of the promised land. There had already been a great triumph in the adding of 3,000, and then 5,000 believers to the body of Christ. That paralleled the occupation of the city of Jericho. People had experienced a great outpouring of the Spirit upon praying for boldness. Believers are speaking the Word of God with boldness, and great grace is upon them all. Alas, however, we now face the revelation of some corruption among them. This is nothing less than a manifestation of Satan’s working. It is like a menacing flood sent forth by him to lure the church out of its hiding place – away from spiritual nourishment into the world.

The circumstance is much like that of Israel when they began its occupation of the promised land. There had already been a great triumph in the adding of 3,000, and then 5,000 believers to the body of Christ. That paralleled the occupation of the city of Jericho.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA SOLD A POSSESSION

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession . . .” Other versions read, *“sold a piece of property,”*^{NIV} *“got money for his property,”*^{BBE} *“sold his field,”*^{MRD} *“sold some property”*^{LIVING} *“sold a farm of his,”*^{MONTGOMERY} and *“sold some property that belonged to them.”*^{GNB}

Perhaps the action of Barnabas (4:36-37) provoked this deed. The fact that Barnabas had received special attention by the apostles might also have played a role in this. If so, neither his

person nor his deed were seen correctly. This is the only place in all of Scripture that Ananias and Sapphira are mentioned. In the book of Acts, there are two other men with the name Ananias. The first was a righteous man chosen by God to go to Saul of Tarsus, in order that he might receive his sight, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and be called into the apostleship (Acts 9:10-17; 22:12). The second was a high priest before whom Paul the apostle once stood. This is the priest who commanded that Paul be smitten on the mouth (Acts 23:2; 14:1).

Ananias and Sapphira are like several others concerning which only

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example– by Given O. Blakely

their transgression is known. Among the others are, Judas, Alexander the coppersmith, Hymanaeus, Philetus, Diotrefes, and others. This circumstance confirms these people are examples to be duly noted. It is possible for an individual to be known **only** for the iniquity they do – even people who were associated with the church, as the example before us corroborates.

Although this verse does not specify what the “possession” was, the third verse tells us it was a piece of land. Coincidentally this is the same kind of possession Barnabas had sole – “land” (Acts 4:37). To this point, the deed seems very commendable – that is, if we judge according to appearance. The Spirit, however, divulges a condition that will

consent, dishonestly kept back part of the price which he received for I,^{WEYMOUTH} *“kept back some of the purchase price, with the connivance of his wife.”*^{MONTGOMERY} and *“And with his wife’s knowledge and connivance he kept back and wrongfully appropriated some of the proceeds.”*^{AMPLIFIED}

Remember the environment in which this deed occurred. A number of brethren who “were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought **the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles’ feet**” (Acts 4:34-35). Among these was a notable man named Barnabas who had a piece of land, “sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:37). In both references, all of the

whomsoever much is given, **of him shall be much required**” (Luke 12:48). God will not receive mediocre responses to extraordinary grace – much less sinful ones! When a lot has been given and revealed from heaven, a lot is expected of the people to whom it was granted.

When Jesus walked among men, it is said of His ministry, “The people who sat in darkness **saw a great light**” (Matt 4:16). To reject or spurn that light constituted a greater transgression. That is why Jesus said to those who saw Him work, yet did not receive Him, “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That **it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee**” (Matt 11:23-24). And again, “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, **and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here**” (Matt 12:41). And yet again, “The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, **and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here**” (Matt 12:42).

And, why is it that Sodom and Gomorrah will receive more consideration on the day of judgement than many who were exposed to Jesus? Why will the city of Nineveh rise up in the day of judgment and condemn whole generations who knew about Jesus? What is the reason for the Queen of Sheba condemning those who did not avail themselves of the ministry of Jesus? **It is because all such people and generations had been give more – more advantages, more truth, more opportunities!** This is the manner of the Kingdom, and it has always been that way.

Take, for example, our own assembly. All who know the situation here know that we have been given more, see more, and have a greater understanding than is ordinarily found in the churches. No person of sound mind

Sin in any form is always out of order. However, it is even more serious when it is within the framework of greater grace and truth, and more brightly shining light. When unusual benefits are lavished upon men from heaven, unusual responses are also required.

affect the nature of the deed itself.

THEY KEPT BACK PART OF THE PRICE

“ . . . and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it . . . ” Other versions read, “And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it,^{NKJV} “and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge.”^{NASB} “With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself,”^{NIV} “with his wife’s knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds,^{NRSV} “And by fraud kept back part of the price of the land, his wife being privy thereunto,”^{DOUAY} “And kept away part of the price, his wife also being of counsel,”^{GENEVA} “They agreed to hold back some of the money they had pledged,”^{GWN} “and carried away [part] of the price and concealed it, his wife consenting,^{MIRD} “With his wife’s consent, he kept the rest,”^{NLT} “and did keep back of the price – his wife also knowing,”^{YLT} “His wife had agreed to this deception,^{LIVING} “with her full knowledge and

proceeds were being brought for distribution among those who had “need.” Furthermore, this was strictly voluntary, with no compulsion being placed upon the people other than their own conscience.

In addition to this, these people were in a spiritually charged environment. The church had been filled with the Holy Spirit and were speaking the Word with much boldness (4:31). Everyone was of “one heart and of one soul,” and no one said that what they possessed was their own (4:32). The apostles had powerfully given witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and “great grace was upon them all” (4:33).

Sin in any form is always out of order. **However, it is even more serious when it is within the framework of greater grace and truth, and more brightly shining light.** When unusual benefits are lavished upon men from heaven, unusual responses are also required. Jesus Himself said, “For unto

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example– by Given O. Blakely

will contest that we are regularly exposed to matters of greater depth and larger scope than the average Christian. However, all of that does not justify any boasting. **It means that God expects more of us.** Mediocrity and spiritual stupidity had better not been found among us. None among us can be guilty of leaving their first love, or growing tolerant of sin, or even indulging their carnal appetites. This is not a matter of moral law, but of spiritual principle. **God will simply not shower an abundance of holy rain upon a field, then stand by tolerantly when it yields "thorns and briars."** Should that circumstance be found, we are solemnly told the land *"is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned"* (Heb 6:8).

They Kept Back Part

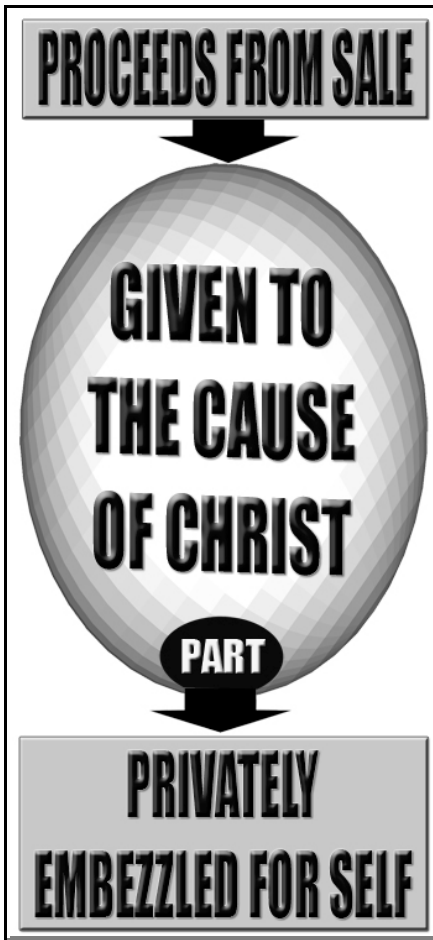
The words "kept back" are most arresting. They come from a Greek word that is only used three times in the Scriptures – twice in this text, and once in Titus 2:10. There is it translated "purloining,"^{KJV} "pilfering,"^{NASB} or "steal."^{NIV} For those who are interested, the Greek word used here is *ἐνοσφίσατο* (e-nos-fi'sa-to). Its lexical meaning is, "to purloin, embezzle, withdraw covertly and appropriate to one's own use,"^{THAYER} "misappropriate, steal, embezzle,"^{FRIBERG} "to steal, to rob,"^{LEH} "put aside for oneself, misappropriate."^{GINGRICH}

How serious is it when someone gives something to the Lord and His work, then holds back part of it for themselves? When once a decision has been made to commit something to the Lord, whether it is one's life, their goods, or a portion of their money, does it make any difference whether or not that person decides later to keep back a portion for himself? **This text refers to that kind of act as embezzlement, theft, and misappropriation. It is really taking something that no longer belongs to the person.**

The seriousness of this deed will be confirmed in what happened to both Ananias and Sapphira. This is a record of heaven's response to covetousness, deception, and making a place for Satan. Actually, we will be told exactly what took place in this incident, so there will be no question about what was involved.

An Application

The practice of Ananias and



Sapphira is far more common within the professed church than may be thought. It is not at all unusual for someone to formally commit their life to Christ, then take back some of it for themselves. There are those who promise to honor the Lord the firstfruits of their labor, as God requires (Prov 3:9), for the tithe is the Lord's, as holy men of all ages have acknowledged (Gen 14:20; 28:22; Deut 14:22; Mal 3:8-10; Matt 23:23; Heb 7:8). Referring to the practice of the tithes supporting the Levitical priesthood, Paul said, *"Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel"* (1 Cor 9:13-14).

Yet, some take of this firstfruits for themselves, as though it belonged to them. **If ever we are tempted to engage in such activity, we must remember this incident.** It will contribute to our sobriety

in this most personal, yet vital, part of living unto the Lord. In the case of the tithe (which existed before the Law), there is a slight difference. **The tithe in its entirety belongs to the Lord.** In the case of our text, the determination of the people was the point. They were not under any obligation to sell their land and give the proceeds to the apostles for distribution. However, when that determination had been made, it became a moral law to them, and was not to be violated in any way.

THEY BROUGHT A CERTAIN PART

"... and brought a certain part, and laid it, at the apostles' feet." Other versions read, *"and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet,"*^{NASB} *"but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet,"*^{NIV} *"and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet,"*^{NRSV} *"and took the rest and put it at the feet of the Apostles,"*^{BEBE} *"and turned only part of it over to the apostles,"*^{GWN} *"took the remainder, and put it at the feet of the apostles,"*^{NAB} *"He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount,"*^{NLT} *"and, from the sale, he gave some of the money to the apostles,"*^{IE} and *"and brought only a part of it and put it at the disposal of the apostles."*^{WILLIAMS}

As will be made clear, the sin here was in representing the "certain part" as though it was the whole. Once the proceeds had been devoted to the Lord, it became unlawful to separate them for personal use. Therefore, there was deceit in this matter, as well as a deliberate lie and misrepresentation. While the whole incident may appear minor on the surface, the consequences will show that a great deal of significance was attached to it.

The Figures Given Under the Law

Under the Law, which contained deliberate and numerous figures of New Covenant realities, the Lord introduced the principle violated by Ananias and Sapphira. The principle is this: **what is given to the Lord cannot be taken for personal uses.** An example is the incense that was used in the tabernacle. It emitted a fragrant odor, yet could not be compounded for personal use. *"And thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put*

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example— by Given O. Blakely

of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy. And as for the perfume which thou shalt make, **ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof:** it shall be unto thee holy for the LORD” (Ex 30:36-37). The firstfruits of the land were also devoted exclusively to the Lord, and were to be given without delay. **“Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me”** (Ex 22:29). The tithe was also to be given wholly to the Lord – all of it. **“And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD’S: it is holy unto the LORD”** (Lev 27:30).

Also, in the sacking of the city of Jericho, the people were told to take all of the **“silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron,”** and bring them into the treasury of the Lord. They were consecrated to Him. **“But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they**

Ananias and Sapphira had taken what they publically said was given to the Lord, and kept it for their own use. They surely knew the Law concerning making vows to the Lord. “When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee”

shall come into the treasury of the LORD” (Josh 6:19). Ignoring the word of the Lord, Achan saw **“two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels.”** He did not bring them into the **“treasury of the Lord,”** but rather put them in his own tent, mingled with his personal possessions (John 7:18-19). His deed **“troubled”** the whole house of Israel, and cost him his life, as well as the lives of his sons and daughters. He had put what belonged to the Lord in his own tent, and thus was judged.

Ananias and Sapphira had taken what they publically said was given to

the Lord, and kept it for their own use. They surely knew the Law concerning making vows to the Lord. **“When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee”** (Deut 23:21). They departed from the spirit of David, from whose lineage the Savior had come according to the flesh. They would have done well to have embraced the spirit of David, and said, **“I will pay Thee my vows”** (Psa 66:13), and **“I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all His people”** (Psa 116:14,18). God takes the vows of men seriously.

SATAN FILLS HIS HEART, AND ANANIAS LIES TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

“³ But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?”

In Eden, there was no door of repentance opened for Eve, nor for Adam. Once Cain had committed his dreadful deed, there was no provision for recovery. When Esau sold his birthright, it could not be recovered. After Judas had betrayed the Lord Jesus, there was no way to undo the deed. There have been sins from which recovery was not possible – like the sins of Uzzah (2 Sam 6:6-7), Onan (Gen 38:9-10), Jehoram (2 Chron 21:18-19), Herod (Acts 12:23), and others. In this text, no space will be allowed for Ananias to repent and recover. Here, judgment will be rendered immediately.

Among other things, this account would produce a high level of sobriety among professing Christians. There is an

attitude about sin in the modern church that is altogether too tolerate. Somehow, a God has been proclaimed that can easily endure sin, and is not at all provoked when it is found among those who claim identity with Him. In such a case, the name of the Lord has been taken in vain, violating the commandment of the Lord: **“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain,”** or **“You shall not use or repeat the name of the Lord your God in vain [that is, lightly or frivolously, in false affirmations or profanely]”** ^{AMPLIFIED} (Ex 20:7a). In my judgment, this includes the following.

- ⇨ Claiming to worship Him, while serving other gods, and having other priorities.
- ⇨ Singing to Him without having grace in the heart.
- ⇨ Expressing humorous anecdotes

concerning God.

⇨ Thoughtlessly speaking out His name in oaths and other forms of profanity.

If we wonder how the Lord feels about the flippant use of His name, here is what He said about it: **“for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain”** (Ex 20:7b). Another version reads, **“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.”** This text will reveal some of the involvements in taking God’s name in vain. Remember, the incident before us regards selling a piece of land that was owned by the sellers, receiving proceeds from the sale, and the seller keeping back a part of those proceeds for himself. All of this is within the context of an appearance that suggested the entire proceeds from the sale of the land were being given.

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example– by Given O. Blakely

WHY HAS SATAN FILLED YOUR HEART?

“But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart . . .” Other versions read, *“how is it that Satan has so filled your heart,”*^{NIV} *“why has the Evil One put it into your heart,”*^{BBE} *“why hath Satan tempted thy heart,”*^{DOUAY} *“why did you let Satan fill you with the idea,”*^{GWN} *“how can Satan have so possessed you,”*^{NJB} *“wherefore did the Adversary fill thy heart,”*^{YLT} *“why has Satan taken possession of your heart,”*^{WEYMOUTH} *“why has Satan so completely possessed your heart,”*^{WILLIAMS} and *“why has Satan so filled your mind.”*^{PHILLIPS}

Right here we see the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old. When Achan coveted the goods in Jericho, it was not known at the time it took place. Joshua did not know about the whole matter until some time later, after the Israelites had suffered defeat at the hand of the small city Ai, and a few of their men. Joshua *“tore his clothes, and fell on the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord,”* remaining there until evening, and *“with the elders of Israel,”* while putting dust upon their heads. He then pled with the Lord, saying that the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land would hear of this embarrassing defeat, surround the Israelites, and cut off their name from the earth. God then told him to get up. He proceeded to tell Joshua the following:

- ⇨ Israel had sinned.
- ⇨ Israel transgressed the covenant which God commanded them.
- ⇨ Israel took of the accursed thing.
- ⇨ Israel had stolen.
- ⇨ Israel had dissembled, or lied.
- ⇨ Israel had put what was cursed among their own stuff, or belongings.

Keep in mind, technically, only Achan had committed this deed. However, that is not the way the Lord viewed the matter, and the Lord’s view is really the only view.

Now, in this new era, Peter through the Holy Spirit sees the matter

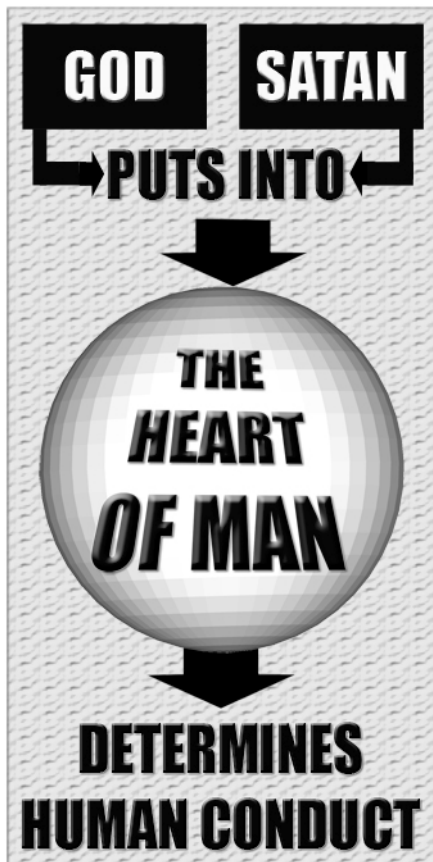
before it spreads or causes any spiritual decline among the saints.

Satan Filled Ananias’ Heart

You may remember that Satan *“put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray”* Jesus (John 13:2).

There are other instances where God Himself put certain things into the hearts of people.

- ⇨ God put it in the heart of Artaxerses to beautify the temple of God (Ezra 7:21-27).
- ⇨ God put it into the heart of Nehemiah to restore the wall around Jerusalem (Neh 2:12).
- ⇨ God put it into the heart of Nehemiah to gather the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, for a genealogical reckoning (Neh 7:5).



- ⇨ God put an earnest concern for the Corinthians in the heart of Titus (2 Cor 8:16).

- ⇨ God put it in the heart of kings of the earth to fulfill His will purpose, and give their kingdoms to the beast (Rev 17:17).
- ⇨ God turned the heart of the Egyptians to hate His people and deal craftily with them (Psa 105:25).
- ⇨ God put wisdom in the heart of Solomon, when he was tender and humble before the Lord (1 Kgs 10:24; 2 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chron 9:23).
- ⇨ The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, and He turns it however He pleases (Prov 21:1).
- ⇨ In the promised New Covenant, God said He would put His fear into their hearts so they would not turn away from Him (Jer 32:40).

For those who are champions of men naturally having a free will, precisely how are these texts explained? Did the people have the option to reject what was put into the hearts? And if that is the case, how can it be established that they had such an option. Or, where is there a case where either God or Satan is said to have put something in the heart of a person, yet they failed to fulfill what was placed there?

The condition of the heart determines who writes upon it, and God alone is the one who assesses the condition of the heart. He alone searches the hearts of men (1 Chron 26:9), knows their hearts (Lk 16:15; Acts 15:8; Rom 8:27), and tries their hearts (Prov 17:3). When they are not pure in His sight, Satan is often given leave to put things into them, such as was put into the heart of Ananias. If they are right in His sight, noble things can be put into them – things that accord with God’s purpose.

If people choose to live at a distance from God, they are in great jeopardy, having been made accessible to the wicked one. This is why wicked people often surface within the church itself, even opposing the choicest of saints, as Diotrephes did John the beloved (3 John 1:9).

Peter affirms that Satan not only

put something in the heart of Ananias, but that he had “filled” his heart. That is, Ananias, was under the control of Satan, taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim 2:26). This happened because he failed to “resist the devil,” and therefore the devil did not “flee” from him (James 4:7). The faith of this man failed, because he did not repel the adversary’s attack by remaining “steadfast in the faith” (1 Pet 5:8-9). This was not a thoughtless deed. It was not committed inadvertently, but was founded upon deliberation and purpose. **Satan cannot captivate the one who resists him.** Those who are remaining “firm” ^{NASB} in their faith, cannot be deceived or knocked down by the devil! At some point, Ananias ceased to embrace the fact that Jesus was the Son of God, else he would not have been overcome. As it is written, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5).

Therefore, Satan not only hurled a fiery dart at Ananias – one that could not be repelled because of his lack of faith – but the dart stuck in his heart, emitting its venom throughout his soul. Thus Peter said Satan “filled” his heart, compelling him to do something unthinkable!

The Circumstances Under Which This Occurred

All of this happened in the midst of a great spiritual awakening, and the experience of profound empowerment. When other souls were filled with the Holy Spirit, Satan filled the heart of Ananias. While others were bold to speak out the Word, Ananias was brazen enough to think only of himself. While “great grace” was upon all of the others, great deception was upon Ananias and Sapphira.

Spirituality and holiness are not caught by being where it is evident in others! I understand that men tend to think if they can only get others to sit under the sound of the truth, and be around those who are filled with the Spirit, that some of it will rub off on wayward souls. However, the case of Ananias and Sapphira prove that this is not the case. The truth of God must be loved (2 Thess 2:10). The things of the Spirit of God must be received (Rom 8:5).

The Spirit Himself must not be grieved, quenched, or resisted (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19; Acts 7:51). The Word of God must fall on honest and good hearts (Lk 8:15). One’s affection must be set on things above, and there must be an earnest quest for the things that are resident where Christ is sitting on the right hand of God (Col 3:1-2). We cannot afford to be naive about these things.

LYING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

“... to lie to the Holy Ghost...”
 “Other versions read, “that you have lied to the Holy Spirit,” ^{NIV} “to be false to the Holy Spirit,” ^{BBE} “that you could deceive the Holy Spirit,” ^{GWN} “that thou shouldst lie against the Holy Spirit,” ^{MRD} “you are lying to the Holy Spirit,” ^{MONTGOMERY} “that you should lie to and attempt to deceive the Holy Spirit,” ^{AMPLIFIED} and “that you could cheat the Holy Spirit.” ^{PHILLIPS}

This is a most arresting word! First, I have no doubt that Ananias did not think of his report as a lie. He and his wife had already determined to keep back part of the price of the land, and now the thought was not of how this appeared to God. He was no doubt only thinking of his own determinations, and not the pronouncement of the living God upon such decisions. **He was not aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit, but thought of himself as having only to deal with Peter.** Further, it is evident that he did not perceive Peter as one possessing the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 16:19).

A Pervading Spiritual Environment

Among things this is like a commentary on the spiritual environment of that early church. The Spirit was maintaining a pervading presence, inspiring and directing the assembly. That surrounding was of such a nature that a lie was considered to be to and against the Holy Spirit Himself. **That is, in order to speaks as Ananias did, he had to purposefully thrust Divine influences from himself.** We know that the Holy Spirit strongly desires the heart and affection of the people of God, lusting against the propensities of the flesh. Thus it is written, “The Spirit lusteth against the flesh,” or the Spirit sets is desire “against the flesh,” ^{NASB} or “what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh” ^{NRSV} (Gal 5:17). James states this

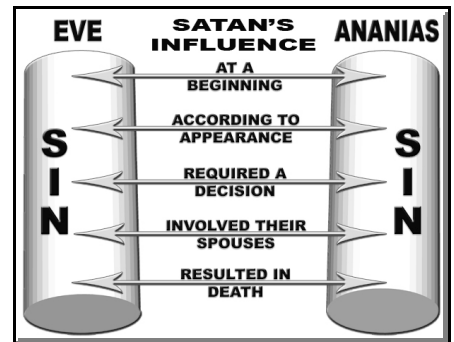
condition in a most unique way: “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously” ^{NKJV} (James 4:5). Another version reads, “The Spirit Whom He has caused to dwell in us yearns over us and He yearns for the Spirit [to be welcome] with a jealous love?” ^{AMPLIFIED}

Do not imagine for a moment that Ananias did not feel the tug of the Spirit here, yearning for his heart and affection. He had to run roughshod over such desires, choosing to give place to the devil, and to follow the vastly inferior callings of the flesh. **Within such a context, it is clear that he was lying to the Holy Spirit.** There is no adequate way to put the seriousness of that circumstance into words.

KEEPING BACK PART OF THE MONEY

“... and to keep back part of the price of the land?” Other versions read, “and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?” ^{NIV} “and put aside for thyself a part of the price of the estate,” ^{ESV} “and conceal of the money of the price of the field,” ^{MRD} “When you claimed this was the full price,” ^{LIVING} “You misused the sale price of the land,” ^{IE} and “and should [in violation of your promise] withdraw secretly and appropriate to your own use part of the price from the sale of the land.” ^{AMPLIFIED}

This whole matter did not have the appearance of iniquity. However, it was altogether iniquitous in spirit. In fact, there are some similarities between this transgression and that of Eve in the garden.



There are least five parallels here, and each one is worthy of noting. All of these presume the presence and

The original deception of Eve and the transgression of Ananias both occurred at the beginning of an era. At that time, things were pure, and no defilement had yet entered. This should teach us not to trust in beginnings, but in the One who Himself is “the Beginning”

influence of the wicked one, who is ever seeking to destroy the people of God.

- ⇨ The original deception of Eve and the transgression of Ananias both occurred at **the beginning of an era**. At that time, things were pure, and no defilement had yet entered. This should teach us not to trust in beginnings, but in the One who Himself is “*the Beginning*” (Rev 22:13).
- ⇨ Both sins had to do with appearance – things that could be seen with the natural eye – the fruit of a tree, and the fruit of man’s labor. Neither of them appeared to be dangerous according to appearance.
- ⇨ A decision was required in both cases. Temptation was leveled at the parties by the devil, but they had to decide to yield to his influence. Neither of them were captured by brute force, but by deception.
- ⇨ In both cases, the transgression of the one was shared with the spouses: Eve gave the fruit to Adam, and Sapphira consented to the sin of Ananias.
- ⇨ Both transgressions resulted in death. In both cases, the parties involved suffered death. Their’s was a “*sin unto death*”(Rom 6:16; 1 John 5:16).

The Strategy Seen in the Revelation

This also parallels the strategy of the devil as depicted in the Revelation. There he is also seen as aggressive at the beginning, or as soon as he was aware of what was happening. The twelfth chapter

contains the following pictures.

- ⇨ Satan stood before the woman, ready to devour her child as soon as it was born. “. . .and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born” (Rev 12:4).
- ⇨ As soon as Satan was cast into the earth, he set out to persecute the woman. “*And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child*”(Rev 12:13).
- ⇨ As soon as the woman began to be nourished, the serpent cast out a flood to destroy her. “*And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood*”(Rev 12:15).

The devil was frustrated in all of his efforts, never able to fully accomplish what he intended. He made inroads into human activity, but was not able to subvert the purpose of God.

The Strategy Seen in Israel’s Beginning

The same was true in the case of Israel. We have no record of them murmuring until the time of their deliverance came. It was then that they objected to Moses’ intrusion into, what they conceived to be, their affairs (Ex 2:14). After their exodus from Egypt, when they faced the Red Sea, they said they wanted to go back and serve the Egyptians (Ex 14:12). When they found only bitter waters in the wilderness, they murmured (Ex 15:23). Prior to the Lord sending them manna, when they ran out

food, they again murmured against the Lord (Ex 16:1-20. Once again, when they could find no water at all, they also murmured (Ex 17:2-3). **All of this was at the beginning of their trek to Canaan, and after officially becoming a covenanted people.**

This was all the evidence of Satan, seeking to thwart Israel’s entrance into Canaan. He was not able to fulfill his objectives. However, God did fulfill His purpose.

Seen In Zerubbabel’s Experience

When Zerubbabel was stirred up by the Lord (Hag 1:14), and “*began to build the house of God*” (Ezra 5:2), the beginning proved to be very challenging. The people did not cooperate, spending more time on their own houses than on the house of the Lord (Hag 1:2). The heart of Zerubbabel grew faint, and he became discouraged with the beginning of the work. It did not appear to even be getting off the ground, so to speak. God sent him two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to strengthen his hand in the Lord (Ezra 5:1-2).

God sent His prophets to Zerubbabel to admonish him not to despise the day of “*small things,*” or “*small beginnings.*”^{NAB} They assured him the work would be finished, just as God had said – and, indeed, that is precisely what happened: “*this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius*” (Ezra 6:15). Satan tried to stop the work from its beginning, but was not able to do so.

Written for Our Admonition

The records of the covenanted people have been provided “*for our admonition*” (1 Cor 10:11), and “*for our learning*” (Rom 15:4). Not only do they provide a sterling example of the nature of the flesh, but they also speak of both Divine and Satanic activity. They confirm God’s wisdom, Satan’s craftiness, man’s weakness, and our need for Divine guidance and empowerment. From the very dawn of human history, Satan has opposed holy beginnings. It should not surprise us that he did the very same thing when Jesus began building His church (Matt 16:18). His efforts, however, will not produce the results he desires.

IT WAS THEIRS, AND THEY COULD DO WHAT THEY WANTED

^{4a} *Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?"*

Peter now reasons with Ananias, but he does not do so to persuade him. He will rather set the stage for the Lord to receive glory and honor in this matter. **Because of the nature of the transgression, and the circumstances under which it was committed, recovery is not possible.** This will be confirmed by what follows.

Those who flirt with sin, willingly providing a place in which Satan can work, must learn from this incident. This was an example of tempting the Lord – seeing how far one could go in testing Divine tolerance and longsuffering. Such efforts are sinful, as both covenants confirm. In the law it is written, *“Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah”* (Deut 6:16). It was at Massah, when the people encountered bitter water that it is written, *“the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?”* (Ex 17:1-2).

Those in Christ are also reminded concerning tempting the Lord: *“Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents”* (1 Cor 10:9). And again, *“Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years”* (Heb 3:9). Once more it is written, *“Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?”* (1 Cor 10:22).

After everything has been said about how much God loves every soul, how He has good plans for us, and wants us to have the best of everything, we must consider the text before us – the case of Ananias and Sapphira.

IN SENSE, IT BELONGED TO YOU

“Whiles it remained, was it not thine own?” Other versions read, *“While*

I want to emphasize that Ananias' decision would not be considered a serious matter in the average church. It might be considered unwise, or dishonest, but not worthy of as much attention as Peter is giving to the issue. However, this is a serious matter because it revealed a lack of the fear of the Lord, and of faith as well.

it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?” ^{NASB} *“Didn't it belong to you before it was sold?”* ^{NIV} *“While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?”* ^{NRSV} *“While you had it, was it not your property?”* ^{BBE} *“the property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished.”* ^{NLT} and *“before you sold the field, it belonged to you.”* ^{IE}

This confirms that the selling of their goods was not something compulsory for the early church. It was not driven by the presence of need, but by *“the law of Christ,”* which has love and faith as its primary pillars (Gal 6:2,6). There was not an inexorable law that required all believers to meet the needs of their brethren. **This was a matter addressed by brotherly love and kindness, not by law.**

Thus Peter reminds Ananias that as long as the land remained in his care, he could have done with it what he pleased. He did not have to sell it. Yet, when he chose to do so, and to associate that sale with the people and work of the Lord, personal preferences had to be mortified. Selfish interests and godly interests cannot be served by the same action. If something is given to God, self-will is taken out of the picture.

YOU COULD HAVE HANDLED THE MONEY AS YOU SAW FIT

“... and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” Other versions read, *“And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?”* ^{NKJV} *“And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?”* ^{NIV} *“and after you had given it in exchange, was it not still in your power?”*

^{BBE} *“After it was sold, you could have done as you pleased with the money.”* ^{GWN} *“And when sold, again thou hadst authority over the price of it.”* ^{MRD} *“and having been sold, in thy authority was it not?”* ^{YLT} *“Even after you sold it, you could have used the money any way you wanted.”* ^{IE} *“And [even] after it was sold, was not [the money] at your disposal and under your control?”* ^{AMPLIFIED} and *“and after the sale the disposal of the price you received was entirely in your hands, wasn't it?”* ^{PHILLIPS}

Once again, neither the apostles nor the church had required that the complete proceeds of anything sold were to be given to the apostles. If Ananias had said he had decided to give nothing, he would not have been confronted by Peter in this manner. Neither would this confrontation have been necessary if Ananias had said he was giving a part of the proceeds, doing so cheerfully and with a pure heart.

How he handled the proceeds was entirely at his discretion. That is, if he had sold the property purely as a business transaction, then he could have used the money in any way he saw fit. Peter even suggests that after he sold the property, he could have diverted some of the funds for his personal use, as long as he had stated this was the case. **However, when he said he was bringing the whole of the proceeds for distribution as every man had need, that changed the whole matter.**

I want to emphasize that Ananias' decision would not be considered a serious matter in the average church. It

might be considered unwise, or dishonest, but not worthy of as much attention as Peter is giving to the issue. However, this is a serious matter because it revealed a lack of the fear of the Lord, and of faith as well. Nothing that is represented as being done unto the Lord is minor. **Anything and everything that is associated with His name gets the attention of heaven.** Such things are expected to be precisely what they are represented as being. If it is giving, it is to be done cheerfully and to the Lord (2 Cor 9:7). If it is singing, it is to be done with grace in the heart unto the Lord, while the word of Christ is dwelling in us richly (Col 3:16). If it is living itself, it is to be done in self denial, carrying the cross, and following Jesus (Matt 16:24; 2 Cor 5:15). If it is dying, it is to be done *“unto the Lord”* (Rom 14:8).

Here we are confronted with the sin of hypocrisy – of pretending to be something that one is not. In this case, Ananias pretended to have sold his property with the Lord in mind, then given all of the proceeds to His work, as Barnabas did.

This type of conduct is resident in the wisdom of the world, and is wholly incompatible with the wisdom that comes down from above – which wisdom is *“without hypocrisy”* (James 3:17). The wisdom of this world, which is the only wisdom possessed by the *natural man*, is always thinking of personal worldly advantage. **The *spiritual man* is always thinking of the glory of God.**

You may recall how sternly Jesus spoke to hypocrites, pronouncing repeated woes upon them (Matt 15:7; 16:3; 22:18; 23:13,14,15,23,25,27,28,29). Solemnly He told His disciples, *“be not as the hypocrites”* (Matt 6:2,5,16). We are told that a hypocrite shall not come before the Lord – that is, in a state of approval (Job 13:16). The tabernacles of hypocrites will be left desolate (Job 15:34). Isaiah declared that *“the vile person”* is the one who is a hypocrite (Isa 32:6). Yet here, in the early church, this dreadful sin is found among them.

No body of believers must live as though they were insulated against the attacks of the wicked one, or that he

cannot penetrate the thinking of some of their members. We can never take faith for granted, or imagine that we can enter a spiritual coasting mode while we remain in the body. It is not in vain that we are admonished, *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions that are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world”* (1 Pet 5:8-9). Men who do not take this adversary seriously are very foolish, and they are sure to be overcome by him. Believers cannot live casually!

It is true that we are also reminded, *“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). **However, the presence of this gracious Guest, the Holy Spirit, must not be confronted with disinterested souls who grieve and quench Him.** In such a case, the blessing of the Spirit will not be experienced by the individual, and he will consequently be overcome – like Ananias.

SIN WAS CONCEIVED IN THE HEART, AND THE LIE WAS TO GOD

“^{4b} . . . why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.”

Peter continues to reveal what has actually taken place in the heart of Ananias. The Holy Spirit has made this known to Peter, for *“what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?”* (1 Cor 2:11). Here we will see a fulfillment of something Jesus told His disciples they would do. *“Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye*

shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Mat 18:18). What Peter says will be fully implemented, confirming that the power of Christ was resting upon him. Today, there are some men who say they are binding and loosing things upon the earth, but it is largely nothing more than talk. Peter’s words are with both discernment and power.

CONCEIVED IN THE HEART

“ . . . why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?” Other versions read, *“What made you think of doing such a thing?”*^{NIV} *“How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?”*^{NRSV} *“how has this purpose come into your mind?”*^{BBE} *“Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart?,”*^{CSB} *“So how could you do a thing like this?,”*^{GWN} *“Why hast thou set thy heart to do this purpose?”*^{MRD} *“How have you thought up this deed in your heart?”*^{NET} *“What put this scheme into your mind?”*^{NJB} *“How could you do a thing like this?”*^{NLT} *“why is it that thou didst put in thy heart this thing?”*^{YLT} *“Why did you think of doing this evil thing?”*^{IE} *“How is it that you have cherished this design in your heart?”*^{WEYMOUTH} *“How could you have the heart to do such a thing!”*^{WILLIAMS} *“Why then, is it that you have proposed and purposed in your heart to do this thing? [How could you have the heart to do such a deed?]”*^{AMPLIFIED} and *“Then whatever*

Here we will see a fulfillment of something Jesus told His disciples they would do. “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example– by Given O. Blakely

made you think of such a thing as this?"
PHILLIPS

On the one hand, Peter said Satan filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit (5:3). Now he asks Ananias why **HE** conceived of this deed. **From this we see that Satan works in those who make themselves available to him, taking them captive at his will** (2 Tim 2:26), and working in them (Eph 2:2).

Second, sin is always unreasonable – totally nonsensical. That is why Peter challenged Ananias with the word, **“Why?”** The land was his. The choice of what to do with the proceeds from its sale was his. There was no compulsion placed upon him by the apostles to do this thing. It was not a requirement of the collective brethren. Ananias could have resisted the devil. He could have told the truth concerning the whole transaction.

Add to this some of the things he could have done – things that everyone in Christ can do.

- ⇨ He could have asked for wisdom from the Lord for the occasion (James 1:5).
- ⇨ He could have sought for grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16).
- ⇨ He could have followed the Spirit’s leading to mortify the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13).
- ⇨ He could have drawn nigh to God, and then resisted the devil (James 4:7).
- ⇨ He could have considered his ways (Hag 1:5,7).
- ⇨ He could have responded to the grace of God that teaches men to deny ungodliness (Tit 2:11-12).
- ⇨ He could have set his affection on things above instead of on things upon the earth (Col 3:1-2).
- ⇨ He could have called upon the name of the Lord and been delivered (Rom 10:13).
- ⇨ He could have avoided the appearance of evil (1 Thess 5:22).

- ⇨ He could have preferred the brethren over himself (Rom 12:10).
- ⇨ He could have put on the new man and put off the old man (Eph 4:22-24).
- ⇨ He could have sought and found the way of escape that comes with every temptation (1 Cor 10:13).
- ⇨ He could have refused to make a place for Satan (Eph 4:27).
- ⇨ He could have been sober and vigilant (1 Pet 5:8).
- ⇨ He could have “put on the whole armor of God,” and thus been able to stand in the evil day (Eph 6:10-18).
- ⇨ He could have made “no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14).

It is really not as easy for a Christian to sin as some allege. Some aver that all one has to do is *nothing* – but that is not true! Failing to *do* the things I have just mentioned is **not**

synonymous with doing *nothing*. It is rather *doing* something other than what ought to be done. A person does not sin, or plan to sin, by doing nothing, but by **doing** something. They choose to walk in the flesh, listen to the wrong voice, and put their affection in the wrong place.

When Peter asked Ananias, “*Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart?*”^{NASB} he was not seeking an answer. The question was a rhetorical one, like the one God asked Adam: “*Hast thou eaten of the tree?*” (Gen 3:11). Or

the one He asked Cain: “*Why art thou wroth?*” (Gen 4:6). A rhetorical question is actually one in which no answer is expected. It is rather asked for effect – in this case to emphasize the absolute foolishness of what was done. Ananias’ deed was done with thought and careful planning and deliberation. Then it was carried out in meticulous detail and without any evidence of shame or a twinge of conscience.

LYING TO GOD

“... *thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.*” Other versions read, “*You did not lie to us, but to God!*”^{NRSV} “*you have been false, not to men, but to God,*”^{BBE} “*You didn’t lie to people but to God!*”^{GWN} “*Thou hast not lied against men, but against God,*”^{MRD} “*You have lied not to human beings, but to God,*”^{NAB} “*You have been lying not to men, but to God,*”^{NJB} “*It is not to men you have told this lie, but to God,*”^{WEYMOUTH} and “*You have not [simply] lied to men [playing false and showing yourself utterly deceitful] but to God.*”^{AMPLIFIED}

On the surface, it certainly looked like Ananias was lying to men. I am sure that God was not in his mind when he

The question was a rhetorical one, like the one God asked Adam: “Hast thou eaten of the tree?” Or the one He asked Cain: “Why art thou wroth?” A rhetorical question is actually one in which no answer is expected. It is rather asked for effect – in this case to emphasize the absolute foolishness of what was done.

delivered a thoroughly false view of what he was doing. Although it is true that this man sought to deceive men, yet that was not his crowning sin, and Peter knew it. At the root of the matter, sin is against God himself, the Creator and Sustainer of all men. That is why David, when convicted in his heart concerning the incident with Bathsheba, cried out to the Lord, “***Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest***” (Psa 51:4).

When Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, the Lord said they had *“gathered together against the Lord”* (Num 16:11). When Israel rejected Samuel, their aging judge, the Lord told Samuel, *“they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me”* (1 Sam 8:7).

Ananias had not transgressed an apostolic commandment, for they had not issued one in regard to this matter. God Himself is the One who said, *“Thou shalt not bear false witness”* (Ex 20:16). Again He said, *“... neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another”* (Lev 19:11). Jesus also confirmed this commandment: *“Thou shalt not bear false witness”* (Matt 19:18). Ananias, however, chose to ignore this word, and even planned to do so, conceiving sin in his heart, and then carrying it out.

who knoweth us?” (Isa 29:15). Sensitive souls, however, know such a thought is nothing more than a delusion. That is why David wrote, *“For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, Thou knowest it altogether”* (Psa 139:4).

⇒ Second, in order to sin, a false view of God must be embraced – a view in which it is thought that sin is not repulsive to God, and that He will not respond adversely to it. Israel had this attitude when they dishonored the Lord with unacceptable sacrifices. In insolence they said, *“Wherein have we despised Thy name?”* and *“Wherein have we polluted Thee?”* (Mal 1:6-7). When God charged them with robbing him, they replied, *“Wherein*

and the preaching of *“all the counsel of God”* (Acts 2:42; 20:27; 1 Tim 1:10). While it is true that this was a most unusual occurrence, it does confirm the intrusive nature of the flesh.

The only way to arm the church against such intrusions is to deliver the truth, for only the knowledge of the truth makes men free (John 8:32). In this regard, the church is the appointed *“pillar and ground of the truth”* (1 Tim 3:15). **Whatever the church may or may not get done, this is its fundamental work – to make the truth known!** It is to set forth an accurate view of both God and Christ. It is to assist men in obtaining a proper view of both the nature and purpose of God. **If the church does not do that, it makes no difference what else it may appear to be doing.**

God has declared Himself to be *“a God of truth”* (Deut 32:4). That is, not only does the truth issue forth from Him, but **He works within the context of truth.** Nothing in all of Scripture suggests that God works for the good of people within the context of a lie, or the misrepresentation of His Person. And, where is there an insightful person who does not know there are serious falsifications of God within the church. Let me remind you of a few of them.

- ⇒ That God’s love is unconditional, even though Jesus declared it was conditional (John 14:21,23; 16:27).
- ⇒ That God gravitates to praise, even though the actions of the people themselves are not *“thankworthy”* (1 Pet 2:19).
- ⇒ That if people are winning souls, that offsets every other moral and spiritual condition – when God has declared walking *“worthy of God”* is the critical factor (1 Thess 2:12).
- ⇒ That God desperately wants to be part of every person’s life, when reconciliation is clearly declared to be that of man to God, not God to man (Col 1:20-21).
- ⇒ That God has established certain inexorable laws for good that will be fulfilled in every person, whether they are true worshipers or now –

The only way to arm the church against such intrusions is to deliver the truth, for only the knowledge of the truth makes men free. In this regard, the church is the appointed “pillar and ground of the truth.” Whatever the church may or may not get done, this is its fundamental work – to make the truth known! It is to set forth an accurate view of both God and Christ.

As the fifty-first Psalm indicates, this constituted doing evil in God’s sight, or sinning in His face, so to speak. It likewise involved judging God, as also declared in David’s confession. **That is, Ananias evaluated his own judgment above that of the Lawgiver Himself!** Of course, in order to commit sin, this is what a person has to do – he has to give the greater weight to his personal view, and the lesser weight to the word of the Lord.

Seeking to Deceive God

Lying to God is nothing less than an attempt to deceive Him. There are several ways that this can be done.

⇒ First, sin assumes that it will not be detected by God, and thus the person will not be called into account for it. Deceived souls reason, *“The Lord seeth us not”* (Ezek 8:12). Thus, when Israel tried to hide their counsel from the Lord, they reasoned in their hearts, *“Who seeth us? and*

have we robbed Thee?” (Mal 3:8). How is it that they could reason in such a manner – one that was diametrically opposed to the Divine assessment of their condition? **It was because they had an improper view of God.**

As shown above, neither of these false postulates is true. God not only beholds the actions of men, but weighs them in the balance of Divine judgment. As it is written, *“the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed”* (1 Sam 2:3). Yet, Satan so deceives the hardened heart that the one who is sinning reasons that either his sin will not be detected, or that God will be gentle and forbearing when He sees it. Both views are dangerously wrong, as this incident will confirm.

The Responsibility of the Church

The incident of Ananias and Sapphira took place when the people were being submitted to *“sound doctrine”*

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example– by Given O. Blakely

when God has declared *“unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure”* (Tit 1:15).

- ⇨ That God is tolerant of an ignorance of Himself – even though that is the kind of ignorance that alienates people *“from the life of God”* (Eph 4:18).
- ⇨ That God does not require holiness – even though He has affirmed of holiness, *“without which no man shall see the Lord”* (Heb 12:14).
- ⇨ That a person can remain in a state of spiritual juvenility, and still be acceptable to God – even though we are told that failing to go on to perfection leads to falling away and perdition (Heb 6:1-6; 10:38-39).

Add to this the fact that only Jesus really knows who the Father is, and that He must *“will”* to reveal Him to a person before they can know Him. As Jesus said, *“Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him”* ^{NKJV} (Mat 11:27). If, therefore, a person does not know God, or is unacquainted with His ways, Jesus has not instructed him. If that person has been in an environment in which Jesus has been obviously teaching and working (as in our text), **then they have ignored the teaching Jesus, choosing their own way**

over His.

First, if the religious environment has not been one in which Jesus is teaching and working, then it is

Second, God does **not** root and ground His people through a defective message and emphasis. This is because true growth is preceded by speaking *“the truth in love”* (Eph 4:15). It also is the

Remove the truth from the picture, and the new birth, growth, and spiritual stability are rendered impossible. Men cannot be established with a lie, or bear fruit unto God by means of misrepresentations of Him.

because the truth has not been set forth – **for Jesus always teaches and works within the context of truth.** In that case, both the church leaders and the ones who are ignorant will be held in account. Because the blind led the blind, they both will fall into the ditch. Jesus said of the false leaders of his day, *“Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch”* (Matt 15:14). The injunction *“Let them alone”* means *“Leave them,”* ^{NIV} *“ignore them,”* ^{NLT} and *“disregard them.”* ^{AMPLIFIED} The reason for getting away from them ought to be obvious. First, they are a living contradiction to the fact that the church is *“the pillar and ground of the truth.”*

direct result of being taught by Christ *“as the truth is in Jesus”* (Eph 4:21). **Remove the truth from the picture, and the new birth, growth, and spiritual stability are rendered impossible.** Men cannot be established with a lie, or bear fruit unto God by means of misrepresentations of Him.

All of this ought to be readily apparent, and require no further proof. If God allowed any form of genuine life to be initiated or maintained by means of a lie, He would have to deny Himself – and that is something that simply is not possible (2 Tim 2:13). These are matters that must be declared by teachers and be pondered by the elect.

ANANIAS DIES AND IS BURIED

“⁵ And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. ⁶ And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.”

The words of Peter have been strong. Will the God of heaven stand behind them? **Has the transgression of Ananias really been as serious as the insightful assessment of Peter suggests?** Is this occasion nothing more than an exchange of opinions? Or is this actually a revelation of an unacceptable condition? In a time such as ours, when

religious is largely powerless, and the Lord is not obviously at work within the professing church, it becomes easy to say, *“That is just your opinion.”* Or, *“I cannot agree with what you have said.”* Or, *“That is not the way I see it.”* But in an environment charged with the presence of the Lord that will not always be the case. **The more God is evident, the more clearly His work will be seen. The more the name of the Lord is at stake, the more likely it is that contradicting conduct will be judged.** There is no law, or principle, revealed on this matter. It is possible for Herod to kill James, and the council to have Stephen stoned. However,

when it is essential for the propagation of the truth, and the execution of the purpose of God (things He alone knows), we can count on Him to judge sin. Such a case is before us.

ANANIAS FELL DOWN AND GAVE UP THE GHOST

“And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost. . . .” Other versions read, *“Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last,”* ^{NKJV} *“When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died,”* ^{NIV} *“And at these words, Ananias went down on the earth, and his life went from him,”*

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example– by Given O. Blakely

BBE “When he heard these words, Ananias dropped dead.”^{CSB} “and Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and expired.”^{DARBY} “When Ananias heard these words he collapsed and died.”^{NET} “As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died.”^{NLT} and “As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor, dead!”^{LIVING}

Remember, this is an account of a **“sin unto death”** (1 John 5:16) – that is, a sin that led to death, which could not be averted. John reminds us that prayer has no point in such cases: “*There is a sin [that leads] to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.*”^{AMPLIFIED}

In his words to Ananias, Peter was not calling him to repentance, and Jesus gave him no space at this time to repent. There are times when such “space” is granted (Rev 2:21), but men cannot insist that such an allotment of time be given to them. **There is a sense in**

“righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” Upon hearing those words, “Felix trembled.” However, in spite of that trembling, he opted to **not** respond to Paul’s words. He thought it best to wait for a “more convenient season” (Acts 24:25). So far as the record is concerned, that *season* never came. Again, when Paul reasoned with Agrippa, the king responded, “*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*” (Acts 26:28).

The words delivered to Ananias were also weighty and powerful – **but they were not intended to provoke repentance.** The point to see here is that, contrary to all fleshly inclinations, Ananias did not speak so much as a word in the defense of his deceptive deed. Neither was he gripped with contrition of heart – at least there was no indication of such a reaction. You can rest assured he was not indifferent to what Peter said to him. It will become apparent that this

Divine judgment, with the exception “eight souls” (Gen 7:21; 1 Pet 3:20).

- ⇨ **SODOM AND GOMORRAH.** The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and “the cities of the plain” were decimated by fire and brimstone, together with “all the inhabitants” (Gen 19:24-25).
- ⇨ **ONAN.** The Lord “slew” Onan because he “did the thing which displeased the Lord” (Gen 38:9).
- ⇨ **THE FIRSTBORN IN EGYPT.** The firstborn of all of Egypt were smitten dead in the last plague the Lord leveled upon Egypt – “all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle” (Ex 12:29).
- ⇨ **PHARAOH’S ARMIES.** Pharaoh and his armies were drowned in the Red Sea at the direction of God (Ex 14:28; 15:4).
- ⇨ **THE ARMIES OF THE AMORITES.** Great numbers of the Amorite armies were killed with “large hailstones from heaven” (Josh 10:11).
- ⇨ **KING HEROD.** King Herod was smitten dead for receiving honor that was due only to the God of heaven (Acts 12:23).

There is a sense in which any and every sin can potentially lead to instant death – as in this case. Men ought to keep this in mind when they are assaulted with temptations. It will assist them in standing against the wiles of the devil.

which any and every sin can potentially lead to instant death – as in this case. Men ought to keep this in mind when they are assaulted with temptations. It will assist them in standing against the wiles of the devil.

Ananias Heard Peter’s Words

It seems to me that the manner of Peter’s speech, and the remarkable level of insight that he had been given, must have captured the attention of Ananias. It would have been exceedingly difficult for him to be indifferent at that time. **This is because there is a certain weightiness to the spoken truth that penetrates to man’s inner being.**

An example of this is Paul’s reasoning with Felix concerning

judgment was primarily for the sake of those who saw it and heard about it.

Ananias Falls Down Dead

Here a case where heaven stood solidly behind Peter’s inspired assessment of the case. Ananias did not drop dead due to natural causes. **This was a judgment from God.** There are numerous judgments record in Scripture that are of this order. Here are a few examples.

The Ungodly In the World Slain

There are several instances of the wicked who had no covenant association with God being judged unto death.

- ⇨ **THE FLOOD.** The judgment of the entire world at the time of Noah. “Every man” died as a result of

- Death Judgments Among the Covenanted People of God**
- There have also been judgments of death ministered from heaven against those who were numbered among the covenanted people of God. Here are a few examples.
- ⇨ **NADAB AND ABIHU.** Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, were killed with fire from heaven because they offered “strange fire” upon the altar (Lev 10:1-2).
 - ⇨ **THE UNFAITHFUL SPIES.** The men who brought up an evil report when they spied out the land of promise, “died by the plague before the Lord” (Num 14:37).
 - ⇨ **AN INSURRECTION AGAINST MOSES.** 14,700 men died because of an

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example– by Given O. Blakely

insurrection that was raised up against Moses (Num 16:49).

- ⇒ **FIERY SERPENTS SENT.** *“Much people of Israel died”* in the judgment of fiery serpents, sent among them by the Lord because they murmured (Num 21:6).
- ⇒ **AN OUTBREAK OF IMMORALITY IN ISRAEL.** 24,000 Israelites died because of an outbreak of whoredom with *“the daughters of Moab”* (Num 25:9).
- ⇒ **KORAH’S INSURRECTION.** In the insurrection of Korah against Moses, the earth opened up and swallowed them, with an additional 250 men being devoured by fire (Num 26:10).
- ⇒ **THE ISRAELITE BELIEVE A FALSE REPORT.** 600,550 Israelites died in the wilderness because they believed a false report concerning the promised land (Num 1:44-45; 14:22-23,29,32-33; Heb 3:17).
- ⇒ **THE BENJAMITES.** 25,100 of the Benjamites were killed because *“they trusted unto the liars in wait which they had set beside Gibeah”* (Judges 20:35).
- ⇒ **THE CASE OF UZZAH.** The Lord was *“kindled against”* Uzzah because he touched the ark of the covenant, and *“smote him”* so that *“he died by the ark of God”* (2 Sam 7).
- ⇒ **KING SAUL.** King Saul *“died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord”* – specifically in asking counsel from a woman with a familiar spirit (1 Chron 10:13-14).
- ⇒ **THE CORINTHIANS.** The Lord caused some in Corinth to die because of their conduct at the table of the Lord (1 Cor 11:30).

Some Conclusions

What takes place in our text should not be counted as a strange thing. **The Scriptures clearly make known a God who is wholly intolerant of sin.** They also reveal that He does judge iniquity in this world as He deems best.

The *“true God”* (John 17:3) can react in the manner made known in our

text, and we cannot afford to be ignorant of that fact. In this day, we have a situation similar to a time in the history of Israel. It is said of that period, *“Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law”* (2 Chron 15:3). God had certainly not ceased to exist, but he was no longer being proclaimed to any measurable degree. Today, people have been led to believe that the *“God of love and peace”* (2 Cor 13:11) is limited to that description. However, in that capacity, God is promised **ONLY** to those who give heed to this admonition: *“Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you”* (2 Cor 13:11) – or, *“and [THEN] the God of love . . . will be with you,”*^{AMPLIFIED} or *“And then God who gives love and peace will be with you.”*^{WEYMOUTH}

great fear came on all who were present,”^{BBE} *“Everyone who heard about his death was terrified,”*^{GWN} *“and great fear gripped all who heard about it,”*^{NET} *“Everyone was terrified,”*^{LIVING} *“Everyone who heard about this was filled with fear,”*^{LE} *“and all who heard the words were awe-struck,”*^{WEYMOUTH} *“and a strange awe seized everybody who heard it,”*^{WILLIAMS} *“And great dread and terror took possession of all who heard of it,”*^{AMPLIFIED} and *“All who were within earshot were appalled at this incident.”*^{PHILLIPS}

There are two ways in which this text can be understood.

- ⇒ First, it may be thought that this was a private incident, involving only Peter and Ananias, and during which no one else was present. In this case, when the word got out to the rest the

In this day, we have a situation similar to a time in the history of Israel. It is said of that period, “Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law.” God had certainly not ceased to exist, but he was no longer being proclaimed to any measurable degree.

In this text, not only are we being exposed to genuine faith and legitimate spiritual life, the *“true God”* (1 John 5:20) is also being made known, as well as the real *“Head of the body”* (Col 1:18).

Babylon the Great has seriously distorted both God and Christ, so that neither is known to any significant degree within the professing church. In our text, sinners were the exception within the church. In our day, it is the godly who are the exception. We do well to be aware of these things, and to arm ourselves for that situation. It is a dangerous one.

GREAT FEAR CAME ON THOSE WHO HEARD

“. . . and great fear came on all them that heard these things.” Other versions read, *“And great fear seized all who heard what had happened,”*^{NIV} *“and*

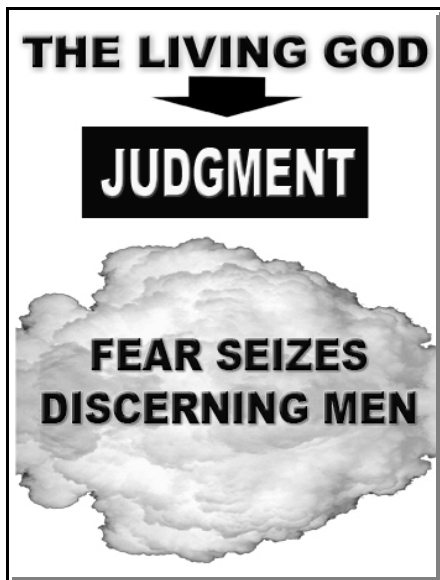
saints, great fear took hold of them.

- ⇒ Second, this matter took place before witnesses, who saw and heard what took place. In this case, the fear seized the ones who were in attendance when the confrontation of Ananias and his death took place.

I am persuaded that the latter is the meaning. That is, there were witnesses present, and fear took hold of them when they heard what Peter said, and saw Ananias drop dead. Two versions represent this meaning: *“all who heard the words,”*^{WEYMOUTH} and *“all who were within earshot.”*^{PHILLIPS} The literal rendering of the text is *“heard these [things IMPLIED],”* **NOT** *“heard OF these things.”* The fact that these things were later said to have been reported to those outside of the immediate surroundings (verse 11), justifies the view that this

verse is speaking about those with a first-hand knowledge of what took place.

Although I have made mention of this in a previous lesson, it seems to me that it should also be accented here. As used in this text, the word “*fear*” is a noun, not a verb. That is, this was something that came upon and seized the people. This was not a mere human reaction, as some versions suggest i.e., “*was terrified,*” ^{NLT} “*were appalled.*” ^{PHILLIPS} **This fear is something that originated outside of men, came upon them, and took hold of them, or seized them.** This was not something within the control of men. Those who heard with any degree of understanding were **seized** by this fear. It was not like the fear of a wild beast or threatening storm. All of the standard versions read “*fear came.*” Other versions expand the word owing to the fact that in the English there is no adequate noun for “*fear,*” as used in Scripture: “*fear seized,*” ^{NIV/NRSV} “*fear gripped,*” ^{NET} “*awe-struck,*” ^{WEYMOUTH} “*strange awe seized,*” ^{WILLIAMS} “*great dread and terror took possession.*” ^{AMPLIFIED}



Remember, there were people there who were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31). They were of “*one heart and one soul,*” and were living selfless lives, wholly devoted to the Lord, and great grace was upon them (Acts 4:32-35). Yet, a certain terror gripped them when they heard and saw the judgment of the Lord.

The Missing Perception

Here is an aspect of the Lord that is largely unperceived in our day. **There is a certain dread that accompanies the immediate presence of the Lord, or the perception of that presence through some judgment coming from Him.** David depicted this in most vivid language. “*Clouds and darkness are round about Him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne. A fire goeth before Him, and burneth up His enemies round about*” (Psa 97:2-3). This is precisely why Moses, to whom God spoke face to face, feared and quaked in the presence of the Lord (Acts 7:32; Heb 12:21). It is why Habakkuk “*trembled*” in himself when he heard a word of judgment directly from the Lord (Hab 3:16). It is why the centurion “*feared greatly*” when Jesus died, and he was convinced He was the Son of God (Matt 27:54). This is the reason the three disciples, who had personally witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus, and Moses and Elijah speaking with him, “*feared as they entered into the cloud,*” in which God addressed them personally (Lk 9:34-35).

No one has ever been keenly aware of the presence of the Lord, or of His focus on the place they occupy, and been casual about it. After Jacob had encountered the Lord in a dream he awakened and said, “*Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not*” (Gen 28:16). It is written that “*he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven*” (Gen 28:17) – and that was his response to a blessed confrontation!

Today, we are being introduced to a “*God*” that bares the characteristics of a congenial grandfather who has no real hatred for anything, and is scarcely capable of becoming angry. However, this is not the God we see in the book of Acts.

Some people associate the presence of the Almighty with tingling sensations, carnal surprise, and fleshly curiosity. Such reactions, however, are evidence of spiritual blindness and ignorance, not of wisdom and spiritual understanding. **No person in the body, however tenured in spiritual life, can knowingly be in the presence of God without experiencing the gripping reality**

of fear. That is the result of being in a body that cannot survive Divine confrontation, for “*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Cor 15:50), and, as God Himself said, “*there shall no man see Me and live*” (Ex 33:20).

A measure of the legitimacy of any body of professed believers is their response to the awareness of the Lord. If they are prone to question His requirements, stagger at His judgements, and be angry with Him when things do not go their way, **they are not thinking of the real God.** Such people have, in fact, embraced an idol – a God that has not been taught by Jesus. Thus John concludes his first epistle by saying, “*And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen*” (1 John 5:21). **An “idol” is any God other than the One Jesus leads us to “know.”**

The brethren in our text were keenly aware of the God who “*is true.*”

THE YOUNG MEN BURIED HIM

“*... And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.*” Other versions read, “*And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.*” ^{NKJV} “*And the young men arose and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.*” ^{NASB} “*Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him,*” ^{NIV} “*And the young men went and made ready his body, and took it out, and put it in the earth,*” ^{BBE} “*And the young men, rising up, swathed him up for burial, and having carried him out, buried him,*” ^{DARBY} “*Some young men got up, wrapped his body in a sheet, carried him outside, and buried him,*” ^{GWN} and “*The young men got to their feet and after wrapping up his body carried him out and buried him.*” ^{PHILLIPS}

The dispatch with which these young men operated is arresting.

- ⇨ They got up.
- ⇨ They came forward.
- ⇨ They found Ananias dead.
- ⇨ They wrapped his body.

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example— by Given O. Blakely

- ⇒ They carried him outside.
- ⇒ They buried him.

All of that required thought, perception, and action. All of this took place while fear had seized, or gripped them. **This was not, then, a paralyzing fear. It was rather a motivating one. Immediately these men knew to get the dead body out of the church, or away from those who were alive unto God.** They knew that the body of Ananias had to be placed out of sight. It no longer could remain among the living.

These were “*the young men*,” not the old men. They were obviously discerning and devoted. They apparently knew what to do, and did not need to be told. Their promptness indicates that

they were privy to what had happened, hearing Peter’s words and beholding the collapse of Ananias. **They were not stunned into a stupor, but aroused into action.**

These are the kind of “*young men*” faith produces. The words “*young men*” come from the Greek word νεώτεροι, which means “younger people,” or youthful ones.”^{THAYER} It covers a wide range of ages ranging from children with understanding, to those who are eligible for marriage. **These younger brethren had not isolated themselves from the rest of the church, but were a part of it.** They did not have a separate leader, but, with the others, were under the leadership of the apostles. They were familiar with the gatherings and activities of the people of

God, as this text confirms.

One wonders how “*the young men*” of the average American church would respond to such an event. How would those enamored of entertainment, music, and games, react to a member of the church dropping dead before their eyes after hearing a scathing rebuke by a man of God? Well, the text before us records precisely how such persons reacted when the church had not been defiled with all manner of erroneous instruction and false doctrine. No divisions existed in the church at this time, and they were all together with one accord. Think of a new youth ministry such as that of our text – carrying out and burying the dead ones. Given today’s situation, that could be very demanding!

SAPPHIRA IS QUESTIONED

“7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. 8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.”

The seriousness of this occasion can be measured in part by the Lord’s extended judgment of it. It does not conclude with the stern rebuke and death of Ananias. **A further confirmation will be given of the total intolerance of God for sin, and the unacceptability of it within the body of Christ.** Actually, men should be able to deduce this from the very nature of salvation. If God could endure even the minuscule presence of sin (if there be such a thing), why would there even be a need for forgiveness, justification, and the advocacy and intercession of Jesus Christ? Why would there be a need for the new birth, sanctification, and the mortification of the deeds of the body if God could tolerate sin in any measure? **However, the entrance of sin into the human race brought a certain obtuseness toward God,** and thus, even among the saved, a point must be made of the repulsiveness of sin to the holy and eternal God.

THE SPACE OF THREE HOURS

“And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in . . .” Other versions read, *“Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.”*^{NASB} *“And it fortuned as it were about the space of three hour after that his wife came in ignorant of that which was done.”*^{TNT} *“About three hours*

wicked deed exposed. **However, it appears that his wife was granted sufficient space to have repented of this deed – three hours.** It was not a day or a week, but “*about the space of three hours.*” The incident was not forgotten because judgment had been poured out upon Ananias, but “*about the space of three hours*” was allotted before the matter was dealt with once again. **During**

This is a miniature picture of day of judgment, when all men will be called into account for what they have done, whether it be good or bad.

later, the wife of Ananias came in, but she did not know what had happened to her husband,”^{IE} and *“About three hours later, his wife came in, without having learned what had taken place.”*^{WILLIAMS}

Ananias, who apparently hatched this plan (for Satan had filled his heart), was not given space to repent. Instead, he died immediately upon hearing his

this time, sufficient time was granted for Sapphira to consider what had been done and repent of the deed.

Every advantage is given for an honest and good heart to surface. She did not know what had happened to her husband, so she could be prompted by any genuine love for the Lord and his people that she may have possessed. She

was even brought in by herself, so there would be no intimidation from her husband.

This is a miniature picture of day

this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"^{NIV} "And Peter answered her, Tell me if ye gave the estate for so much,"^{DARBY} "Peter said to her, 'Tell me, were the two of you paid this amount for the

statement had been made concerning what was given – that it was the whole price of the land. This was not the truth, and therefore Peter seeks confirmation of the complicity of Sapphira in the whole matter, at the same time providing an opportunity for her to reassess her involvement and repent of the deed.

Peter does not take for granted that Sapphira remains hardened. He earnestly seeks for an opportunity to show mercy, inquiring if the money Ananias had brought was the amount they had received for the land. He knew that Sapphira had been privy to the matter, being an accomplice in the determination.

Sapphira Agrees That Was the Price

"And she said, Yea, for so much."^{IE} Other versions read, "And she said, 'Yes, that was the price,"^{NASB} "Yes,' she said, 'that is the price,"^{NIV} "And she said, 'Yes, for so much,"^{DARBY} "Sapphira said, 'Yes, that much,"^{NET} and "Sapphira answered, 'Yes, that was all we got for the field,"^{IE}

of judgment, when all men will be called into account for what they have done, whether it be good or bad.

land?"^{NET} and "Tell me, how much money did you receive for your field? Was it this much?"^{IE}

This will prove to be a dreadful error! To conspire to lie is one thing. It is still worse to proceed with the doing of it. **But what can be said of a person who slams the door of escape in the face of the one making it available?**

PETER ASKS THE QUESTION

" . . . And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?" Other versions read, "And Peter responded to her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price,"^{NASB} "Peter asked her, 'Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"^{NIV} "And Peter answered her, Tell me if ye gave the estate for so much?"^{DARBY} " Peter said to her, 'Tell me, were the two of you paid this amount for the land?"^{NET} and "Tell me, how much money did you receive for your field? Was it this much?"^{IE} Other versions read, "And Peter responded to her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price,"^{NASB} "Peter asked her, 'Tell me, is

Peter does not take for granted that Sapphira remains hardened. He earnestly seeks for an opportunity to show mercy, inquiring if the money Ananias had brought was the amount they had received for the land. He knew that Sapphira had been privy to the matter, being an accomplice in the determination. The property had been sold by "Ananias, with Sapphira his wife" (5:1a). Further, a certain amount had been kept back for personal use, "his wife also being privy to it" (5:1b).

Some might consider this to be prying into private matters, and, ordinarily, such an inquiry would not have been launched. However, a

Here we see the hardening effect of sin upon the individual. The longer it is held within the heart, the more calloused the heart becomes. A certain proverb comes to mind in reading this account. "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Prov 29:1). **In view of this, men ought to be quick to repent, and not provoke the Lord to anger, for He is stronger than us** (1 Cor 10:22). In this case, the wife following her husband and submitting to his judgment will prove to be disastrous. Here, the wife will be responsible for her decision independently of her husband.

AGREEING AND TEMPTING THE SPIRIT

⁴⁹ Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. ¹⁰ Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband."

There is a certain mind-set that is

penetrating the modern church. It has a wholesome sound to it, yet it is punctured with many flaws. It is this – that the church is in the world to "help people." By this men mean that the church is at its finest when it is assisting people with their difficulties, and helping them over situations which are many times the result of their own miserable choices. In fact, a considerable percentage of religious professionals are devoted to this very work – helping people resolve their

problems. Theological schools have joined this enterprise by provided courses that equip and credential people for this purported ministry. We now have marriage counselors, financial advisors, life coaches, and a host of other professionals devoted to helping people recover from wrong choices.

When I question the validity of this kind of religious thrust, it will at once appear that I am heartless. **It is**

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example– by Given O. Blakely

assumed that this is a God-ordained work, and is more or less implied in the Gospel of Christ. "Hurting people" need help, we are told, and then reminded that is the work of the church. Behind this whole facade is an overemphasis of the importance of life in this world. If we approach life here without the perception that is it an allotted time in which we prepare for death, the day of judgment, and eternity, we will at once find ourselves on an uncharted sea.

How do you suppose these pseudo-professionals would have approached Ananias and Sapphira? Perhaps they would have assigned them to a four or six week course on Handling Your Finances, or How to Include God In Your Finances, or How to make sound decisions. Nothing of that sort is found here. I can tell you that there is not a person with a counseling mind-set in the world that would have considered the sin of Ananias and Sapphira to be one worthy of instant death. Anyone suggesting such a thing would be considered a religious bigot.

However, after men have philosophized about human difficulties and flawed decisions, we have a case before us that is provided by the Holy Spirit of God. The issues are spelled out in precise detail. The people involved are specified. The nature of the sin is declared, together with the results that were imposed by God. The whole matter is totally lacking of any mystery or ambiguity. All of this demands that we take the incident seriously.

WHY DID YOU AGREE TO TEMPT THE SPIRIT?

"Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" Other versions read, *"How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?"* NKJV *"Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test?"* NASB *"Why have you made an agreement together to be false to the Spirit of the Lord?"* BBE *"How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this?"* NLT *"How could you and your husband even think of doing a thing like this - conspiring together to test the Spirit of God's ability to know what is going on?"* LIVING *"How was it . . . that you two agreed to try an*

experiment upon the Spirit of the Lord?" WEYMOUTH *"How could you two have agreed and conspired together to try to deceive the Spirit of the Lord?"* AMPLIFIED and *"How could you two have agreed to put the Spirit of the Lord to such a test?"* PHILLIPS

This question is asked against the background of reconciliation, the New Covenant, and the new creation. Jesus had reconciled the world to God (2 Cor 5:18-20). The New Covenant was in effect, in which the laws of God were written upon men's minds, and put into their hearts (Heb 8:10; 10:16). Those in Christ were a new creation, with old

of the apostles.

Now, in view of that, Peter asks, *"How could you two have agreed and conspired together to try to deceive the Spirit of the Lord?"* AMPLIFIED **Aside from the moral and spiritual compulsions of the new man, how could they have proceeded with this embezzlement with the evidence of a present God all around them?** What line of sound rationality could have possibly moved these two to plan such a deceitful move? Had they forgotten that *"all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do"* (Heb 4:13)?

In order to avoid committing sin, it must be addressed at the temptation level, when the individual is "carried away and enticed by his own lust." That is the point at which grace can be "obtained," for it is the time of need

things passing away and all things becoming new (2 Cor 5:17). These were not mere goals, they were realities. Add to these the marvelous things that had been taking place among the disciples. Three thousand souls were added to the church on the day of Pentecost. People had been witness of great miracles wrought through the hands of the apostles. A man lame from birth was healed, and in the aftermath, about 5,000 men believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. When threatened by the temple authorities, Peter and John reported the events, and a great prayer meeting was held. Everyone was in one accord at that time. Following the prayer, the place where they were was shaken, all of the people were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with great boldness. The apostles stepped forth and gave powerful witness to the resurrection of Christ. As a result, great grace was upon them all. That grace was evidenced in a remarkable display of selflessness and liberality among the disciples. A man of great faith stepped forward, sold a piece of land that he owned, and laid the proceeds at the feet

Of course, sin, when seen properly, is totally irrational. One aspect of deception is that it renders all views of sin to be theoretical, and therefore opens the door for a kind of self-definition of it. Ananias and Sapphira did not consider what they did to be sin. That is why they did it. Perhaps they thought it expedient, preferable, or more advantageous to their own social condition. *But they did not view it as a transgression against God, and lying to the Holy Spirit.*

This is an aspect of sin that those who flirt with the unlawful fail to see. Their senses become numbed, like a moth who flies round and round a flame, as though it was impervious to it, only to finally singe its wings and fall to helpless to the ground. That is an illustration of James' portrayal of sin. *"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death"* (James 1:15).

In order to avoid committing sin, it must be addressed at the temptation

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example- by Given O. Blakely

level, when the individual is “*carried away and enticed by his own lust.*”^{NASB} That is the point at which grace can be “*obtained,*” for it is the time of need (Heb 4:16). For whatever reason, Ananias and Sapphira had conducted their lives so that an awareness of the tug of the flesh was not apparent to them – at least, not as it could have been. They had lived too close to the world, thereby creating a place in which Satan could work more freely.

In asking this question, Peter has shown the absurdity of what they had done. In order that the rest of the church might be duly warned, Sapphira will not be allowed to recover from her error. Peter will now announce that her death is imminent. Nothing further will be heard from her, and no additional time will be allotted to her.

THE YOUNG MEN ARE WAITING

“*. . . behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out . . .*” Other versions read, “*See, the feet of the young men who have put the body of your husband in the earth, are at the door, and they will take you out.*”^{BEBE} “*Those who buried your husband are standing at the door, and they will carry you outside for burial.*”^{GWN} “*Listen, the footsteps of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out,*”^{NAB} “*The men who have buried your husband are already at the door, and they will carry you out.*”^{WEYMOUTH} and “*Listen, you can hear the footsteps of the men who have just buried your husband coming back through the door, and they will carry you out as well!*”^{PHILLIPS}

How true it is, “*It is a fearful*

penalties and be cast into the hands of the living God!”^{AMPLIFIED} (Heb 10:31). Whatever men may think about God, His nature, and His will, their thoughts cannot change this fact. **God is not One with whom men may trifle – conducting their lives as though He loves them so much that He cannot be moved against them, or raise His hand against them.** Ananas and Sapphira had tread in the courts of the Lord. They had been identified with his people, had seen His hand move among them, and heard the truth declared. Yet, they chose the pathway of their own will over His, all the while presenting themselves as sacrificial servants of God.

Now Peter tells Sapphira that her death is sure, and those who will bury her are on their way to perform that task. We are not told what thoughts coursed through her mind in that brief moment, but you may be sure her mind was active, and there was no indifference in her. **The point here is Divine judgment, not human feelings.** By the Spirit, Peter knew what was going to happen, and made no effort to forestall it. No prayer was made for Sapphira, and no appeal was made for her to repent. With her husband, she had crossed the line of Divine forbearance.

SHE FELL DOWN AND DIED

“*Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost . . .*” Other versions read, “*Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last.*”^{NKJV} “*At that moment she fell down at his feet and died.*”^{NIV} “*Instantly she dropped dead at his feet.*”^{OSB} “*At once, she fell down at his feet and breathed her last.*”^{NAB} “*At once she collapsed at his feet and died.*”^{NET}

fell to the floor, dead.”^{LIVING}

No sooner had Peter spoken, than Sapphira dropped dead, just as her husband did – a judgment from the Lord. They conspired together, they lied together, they died together, and they will be buried together.

She Yielded Up the Ghost

The words “*yielded up the ghost*” are translated from a single Greek word – ἐξέπνευσεν (ek-spo-o-khen). The word means, “*to expire, to breathe out one’s life,*”^{THAYER} “*breathe one’s last,*”^{FRIBERG} “*die,*”^{UBS} “*the process of dying.*”^{LOUW-NIDA} Other versions read, “*her life went from her,*”^{BEBE} “*expired,*”^{DARBY} “*breathed her last,*”^{ESV} and “*died.*”^{MRD}

This expression is to be understood in view of the creation of Adam. It is written that God “*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul*” (Gen 2:7). During the flood, when every living creature died, and all men, except the eight in the ark, those dying are described as “*all in whose nostrils was the breath of life*” (Gen 7:22). Job described life in this way, “*All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils*” (Job 27:3). The frailty of man is described in these words, “*whose breath is in his nostrils*” (Isa 2:22).

In death, the breath of life that is given by God is called back by Him. When the call is issued, there is no way of resisting it, or creating a way of sustaining that life. Thus death is said to be “*yielding up the ghost,*” or the unseen part of the human constitution. While the word “ghost” is generally considered from a superstitious point of view, the modern primary definition of the word is, “*The seat of life or intelligence: soul <give up the ghost>*”^{MERRIAM-WEBSTER} Websters Unabridged Dictionary 2003 gives the definition as “*the life principle or vital spark : the soul regarded as the seat of life or intelligence – now used chiefly in the phrase to give up the ghost.*”

This is a more precise view of what is involved in dying. From a medical point of view, the brain ceases to function, the heart stops beating, the organs no longer operate, and breathing stops. However, that is a purely physiological view of death. It describes the symptoms of death, and not death

No sooner had Peter spoken, than Sapphira dropped dead, just as her husband did – a judgment from the Lord. They conspired together, they lied together, they died together, and they will be buried together.

thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” or “*It is a fearful (formidable and terrible) thing to incur the divine*

“*Instantly she dropped dead at his feet,*”^{NJB} “*and she fell down presently at his feet, and expired.*”^{YLT} and “*Instantly she*

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example– by Given O. Blakely

itself.

Solomon described the difference between man and the brute creation when he wrote, “*Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?*” (Eccl 3:21). Elsewhere he wrote that the spirit returned to the God who gave it: “*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it*” (Eccl 12:7). Solomon is not using the word “spirit” in its most refined sense, as defined in Christ Jesus (1 Thess 5:23; Heb 4:12; 2 Tim 4:22). The word translated “spirit” in Ecclesiastes is taken from a Hebrew word meaning “wind, or breath,” ^{STRONG’S} and refers to the most apparent evidence of life, and not life itself.

The idea is that just as God breathed into Adam’s nostrils giving him life, so He withdraws life from man, as though inhaling instead of exhaling. In other words, life in any form cannot be maintained independently of the Author of life. When the Lord took Sapphira’s life from her, her body collapsed to the ground, for “*the body without the spirit is dead*” (James 2:26).

With this in mind, death is described as the essential person and personal life itself, leaving the body.

- ⇒ Departing (Gen 35:18; 2 Chron 21:20; Phil 1:23).
- ⇒ Giving up the ghost (Gen 25:8; 35:29; Lam 1:19).
- ⇒ Going to ones fathers (Gen 15:15; 25:8; 35:29).
- ⇒ Putting off the tabernacle of the body (2 Pet 1:14).
- ⇒ God requiring the soul (Lk 12:20).
- ⇒ Going in a way from whence there is no return (Job 16:22).
- ⇒ Being gathered to our people (Gen 49:33).
- ⇒ Fleeing like a shadow (John 14:2).

Only God can recall the soul of an individual, refusing to allow life to

continue. So far as judgment in this world is concerned, this is the ultimate Divine judgment in which the Sovereign God determines that a person is no longer fit to live.

Lest we are prone to minimize sin, the transgression that caused this Divine edict was lying about how much money was appropriated in a land sale! Further, the lie was said to be to the Holy Spirit and God, even though it was spoken to Peter.

SAPPHIRA IS BURIED

“... and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.” Other

^{LIVING} They did not comment about the matter, but simply did what had to be done. They “*carried her out and buried her by the side of her husband.*”^{PHILLIPS} I cannot help but wonder how such a sight would be handled in a modern-day assembly.

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE SIN

Ananias and Sapphira sinned against the Spirit of God by lying. Although they were clearly covetous, that is not the transgression with which they are charged. Their overriding sin was that they wanted to appear more generous than they really were, i.e. being counted in the class of Barnabas – “*the pride of life*” (1 John 2:15).

The circumstances were different, and therefore the judgment meted out was also different. The church was in the midst of a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit and grace. Sin is out of order under any circumstances, but especially when it is committed during a time of great blessing, renewal, and insight.

versions read, “*When the young men came in they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband,*”^{NRSV} “*and the young men came in and saw her dead, and they took her out and put her in the earth with her husband,*”^{BBE} “*When the young men came back, they found Sapphira dead. So they carried her outside and buried her next to her husband,*”^{GWN} “*and the young men came in and, seeing that she was dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband,*”^{LIVING} and “*When the young men came into the room they found her a dead woman, and they carried her out and buried her by the side of her husband.*”^{PHILLIPS}

The young men were busy that day. It only took them three hours to wrap the body of Ananias, carry him out, and bury him. Now, they return from the burial site to find another dead body. They were perceptive, and not distracted to other things as young men are often wont to do. Immediately they are described as “*seeing that she was dead.*”

The immediate death for this couple, and that within the brief span of three hours, might appear too harsh of a judgment. After all, Simon of Samaria, a sorcerer, tried to buy the ability to confer the Holy Spirit from Peter. That was certainly an offence of great magnitude, yet he did not die because of it. Peter rebuked him sharply, saying he had no part in what Peter was doing, admonishing him repent and pray to God, “*if perhaps the thought*” of his heart might be forgiven him (Acts 8:18;24). And what of Elymas the sorcerer who sinned grievously when he sought to turn the proconsul of Cyprus away from the faith. But he did not die. Instead, he was struck blind for a season (Acts 13:8-11). But Ananias and Sapphira are stuck down by sudden death.

The circumstances were different, and therefore the judgment meted out was also different. The church was in the midst of a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit and grace. Sin is out of order under any circumstances, but especially when it

is committed during a time of great blessing, renewal, and insight.

Also, because this was a beginning, the unacceptability of sin had to be emphasized. If this did not take place, the foundation upon which the people were being built would not have been sturdy.

Also, it needed to be established that it was not possible to deceive the Lord. A body of believers is in no way harmonious with the course of this present evil world. Should they be tempted to pursue such a route, it will be

sought to deceive the Spirit, proceeding as though the Spirit could not see what they were doing. In lying to a man of God, they were lying to the Spirit who was within him.

⇒ Even though Satan filled his heart, Ananias is charged with **conceiving this plan in his heart** (5:4a). Simply put, he planned to sell the property, keep back part of the proceeds for himself, yet say that the whole price was being given to the apostles for distribution as needed.

operate in this manner. *“With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure; and with the froward Thou wilt show Thyself unsavory”* (2 Sam 22:27). *“With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward”* (Psa 18:26).

WERE ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA DAMNED?

The question might be raised, “Were Ananias and Sapphira damned?” The bottom line answer is, **We do not know**. The fact that this is not revealed confirms that we should not press the matter. We **do** know that there are cases when people are turned over to Satan *“for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord”* (1 Cor 5:5). We also know that there is chastening from the Lord *“that we should not be condemned with the world”* (1 Cor 11:32). However, we have no idea whether either of these applied to Ananias and Sapphira or not. **In fact, their record is in the Scripture in order to induce fear among those who are sloppy in their approach to sin.** Here we are not talking about the sin of fornication, as found in Corinth. In that case, it was a low level of fornication that was not even tolerated among the Gentiles *“who know not God”* (1 Cor 5:11; 1 Thess 4:5). That fornicator was expelled from the church, and given a space to repent. What is even more, he **did** repent, and the church was urged to receive him graciously (2 Cor 2:6-8).

Suffice it to say, every person professing faith in Christ should culture an absolute hatred for sin.

The case of Ananias and Sapphira has been recorded to confirm to our hearts how serious it is to find sin in the body of Christ – any sin! Let us thrust from us any tendency to be tolerant of iniquity.

They tempted the Spirit of God (5:9). In this deed, they were putting God to the test. This couple obviously thought they could get by with what they had done. In this case, the temptation was for God to remain gracious toward them, even though they had lied to Him.

at the expense of the essential ministry of the Holy Spirit.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE SIN

This text contains several different views of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira – and all of them are most sobering.

⇒ First, **they embezzled money** that had been committed to the work of the Lord, keeping back part of the price a property they sold (5:2).

⇒ Second, **Satan filled the heart of Ananias**, moving him to sin against the Lord, and Sapphira agreed to it (5:3a). Thus they both had made a place for Satan, and had quenched the Spirit as well.

⇒ Third, **both Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit** (5:3b). They

⇒ **They did not lie to men, but to God** (5:4b). Even though it appeared as though the lie was told to men, Peter emphatically says it was not to men, but to God. That is how heaven viewed the matter, and that is how it was.

⇒ **Ananias and Sapphira agreed together** (5:9). This was a joint effort, with both parties agreeing to what was being done. There was no dissent by either party.

⇒ **They tempted the Spirit of God** (5:9). In this deed, they were putting God to the test. This couple obviously thought they could get by with what they had done. In this case, the temptation was for God to remain gracious toward them, even though they had lied to Him. The Word of God makes clear that He does not

FEAR FALLS UPON THE CHURCH

“¹¹ And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.”

How should reports like this effect those who know the Lord? How should the church react when it is evident the Lord has judged a person? Our text does

not proclaim a teaching on the subject, but gives us an example – an example that the Holy Spirit selected to be included in Scripture.

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example– by Given O. Blakely

UPON ALL THE CHURCH

“And great fear came upon all the church . . .” Other versions read, *“And great fear came upon the whole church.”* NASB *“Great fear seized the whole church,”* NIV *“The whole church . . . were terrified,”* GWN *“Great fear gripped the whole church,”* NET *“And a great fear came upon the whole church,”* NJB *“and great fear came upon all the assembly.”* YLT *“Terror gripped the entire church,”* LIVING *“This incident struck terror into the whole Church,”* WEYMOUTH *“So a strange awe seized the whole church,”* WILLIAMS *“And the whole church . . . were appalled [great awe and strange terror and dread seized them],”* AMPLIFIED and *“At this happening a deep sense of awe swept over the whole Church.”* PHILLIPS

Here is a body of people that have been basking in the grace of God. Permit me to recall what has been said about those within the number of these people to this point.

- ⇒ 3,000 of them had been *“pricked in hearts”* on the day of Pentecost, and inquired what they ought to do (2:37).
- ⇒ Those among them are described as having *“gladly received his Word, and were baptized”* (2:41).
- ⇒ They were continuing *“steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and the breaking of bread, and in prayers”* (2:42).
- ⇒ Fear had come upon every soul as they witnessed *“many wonders and signs done by the apostles”* (2:43).
- ⇒ Those who believed *“were together and had all things common”* (2:43).
- ⇒ They *“continued with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house”* (2:46a).
- ⇒ They ate their food *“with gladness and singleness of heart”* (2:46b).
- ⇒ They were *“praising God”* (2:47).
- ⇒ At one time, about 5,000 of them had believed when the Temple authorities opposed Peter and (John 4:4).

- ⇒ When they had heard the report of Peter and John, they had all prayed with one accord (4:24-30).
- ⇒ They were all filled with the Spirit, and spoke the Word of God with boldness (4:31).
- ⇒ The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and of one soul (4:32).
- ⇒ It is again witnessed that they had all things common, with no one saying that what he had was his own

to live in a slovenly manner, parading the flesh before God, speaking unadvisedly with their lips, and entertaining foolish thoughts.

For anyone in the body, a keen sense of the Lord’s presence is actually terrifying. This is owing to the absolute holiness of the Lord, and the total unprofitability of the flesh. The more the Lord becomes evident, the more our comparative weakness and uncomeliness become manifest.

- ⇒ This is precisely why Daniel said of his experience of an arresting vision

For anyone in the body, a keen sense of the Lord’s presence is actually terrifying. This is owing to the absolute holiness of the Lord, and the total unprofitability of the flesh. The more the Lord becomes evident, the more our comparative weakness and uncomeliness become manifest.

- (4:32).
- ⇒ After hearing the apostles witness of the resurrection of Christ, *“great grace was upon them all”* (4:33).

These were the people who were *“seized”* by a *“great fear.”* NIV **They had been close to the Lord and blessed by Him, yet they were not close enough to be casual before Him, or blessed enough to not tremble in His presence.**

Again, I want to emphasize that the word *“fear”* is a noun, and not a verb. *“A great fear came upon all the church”* is not exactly the same as *“all the church were found fearing.”* Here, the word fear refers to *“that which arouses fear,”* GINGRICH or **causes** men to be in terror or trembling. One lexical definition is, *“In an objective sense, that which strikes terror.”* THAYER

An example of this condition is articulated by Isaiah the prophet. *“Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread”* (Isa 8:13). It is only men’s lack of the awareness of God that permits them

from God, *“And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king’s business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it”* (Dan 8:27).

- ⇒ On another occasion, after he had seen a vision, Daniel records, *“Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength”* (Dan 10:8).
- ⇒ When an angel came to tell him of the vision, Daniel said, *“O my lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength. For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me”* (Dan 10:16-17).
- ⇒ When Habbakuk heard a message of coming woe from the Lord, he said of the occasion, *“When I heard, my*

belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself” (Hab 3:16).

- ⇒ This accounts for the reaction of John to seeing the glorified Christ: **“And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last”** (Rev 1:17).
- ⇒ It is why Moses, while in the presence of the Lord, said, **“I exceedingly fear and quake”** (Heb 12:21).

experientially very near, having lavished both grace and power upon the people. However, when that nearness was clearly evidence in striking Ananias and Sapphira dead (members of the church) – a great fear took hold of the entire congregation. What had aroused His anger was not heavy on the moral scales of men. No government official would have arrested or incarcerated a person for misrepresenting their gift. However, when the presence of the Lord is clearly known, men think more seriously about themselves, sin, and judgment.

For those with faith, a sense of the Lord’s nearness can be a most

When Ezekiel was given a vision concerning the punishment of Jerusalem, he heard the Lord instruct an angel to **“set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.”** Having done that, six heavenly messengers were sent on a mission of destruction. They were told to spare those who had been marked, but to **“slay utterly”** everyone else, sparing no additional persons. Confirming this, the Lord then added, **“and begin at My sanctuary!”** (Ezek 9:4-6).

That is precisely what the Lord was doing in our text. His judgment was beginning with His house, and the purging started in his sanctuary. **The presence of extensive corruption within the professed church does not testify to the Divine leniency, but to the absence of the living God!** There is absolutely no way to dignify such a condition, for it is one in which the fear of God cannot possibly be experienced.

AND AS MANY AS HEARD

“... and upon as many as heard these things.” Other versions read, **“and upon all who heard of these things,”**^{NKJV} **“and all who heard about these events,”**^{NIV} **“and on all who had knowledge of these things,”**^{BBE} and **“and into the hearts of all who heard of it.”**^{WEYMOUTH}

The news of these two deaths spread rapidly, for it was the working of the Lord. No sooner had people heard of the first death, than the report of a second sounded in their ears. Amidst an environment of great and unparalleled blessing, a severe judgment had taken place. **The people were not mystified, they were terrified.** They did not have a lot of questions, but a lot of fear. They made the association between the death of the wayward couple and the hand of the Lord. They had witnessed the holiness of God, and it was sobering.

I do not doubt that similar judgments have occurred in our day, yet have not been recognized. This is largely owing to the propagation of a false God. **The God that is embraced by multitudes of people is not even capable of action such as that to which we have been exposed.** However, this is the real God, who will **“by no means clear the guilty”**

Men today speak very loosely about the presence of the Lord, often associating it with mysterious and uninterpretable evidences. However, we would see a sudden and drastic change in men’s behavior, attire, and words if something like the striking down of Ananias and Sapphira took place in the average church.

- ⇒ David, the man after God’s own heart, who panted for the living God, said, **“My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments”** (Psa 119:120).
- ⇒ When Isaiah saw the Lord, he responded, **“Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts”** (Isa 6:5).

None of the men I have just mentioned were ungodly. All of them stood tall among men, and had few, if any, equals upon the earth. **Yet, in the presence of the Lord, even their comeliness turned into corruption.** If we were to take Jesus out of the equation of salvation, there would be no hope of enduring the confrontation of the Living God.

In our text, God was, so to speak,

profitable experience. **For those who are unbelieving and riveted to the earth, it produces the ultimate jeopardy and danger.** Men today speak very loosely about the presence of the Lord, often associating it with mysterious and uninterpretable evidences. **However, we would see a sudden and drastic change in men’s behavior, attire, and words if something like the striking down of Ananias and Sapphira took place in the average church.**

Fear Came Upon All the Church

This is only the second mentioning of the word **“church”** (ἐκκλησία) in the book of Acts. We first read of the Lord adding **“to the church daily such as should be saved”** (2:47). Now, for the first time, we read of **“all the church”** – all believers, everyone who was in Christ Jesus. Fear came upon them **“all.”** They had been exposed to a holy God, who will not tolerate sin among His people. That is why **“judgment must begin with the house of God”** (1 Pet 4:17).

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example– by Given O. Blakely

(Ex 34:7), and “not at all acquit the wicked” (Nah 1:3). In Christ, God has provided a way out of the category of “the

guilty” and “the wicked.” However, He has promised neither forbearance nor mercy for those who insist on remaining

there. Our text, as well as the general tone of Scripture demolishes any argument to the contrary..

CONCLUSION

The passage we have just considered confirms heaven’s sensitivity to sin. It is in perfect harmony with all of Scripture, which leaves this indelible impression, beginning in the third chapter of Genesis. **The very first sin committed by the human race appeared incidental. However, the Divine response to it confirms that was not the case at all.** In his epistle to the Romans, Paul spells out something of the involvements of Adam’s single transgression. The ramifications of that solitary sin have sent a devastating wake across the whole of human history, down to this very day. It has even impacted upon the entirety of the natural creation. The universe was cursed, from the earth on which we live, out to the extremities of the celestial order. The impersonal creation was consigned to “*the bondage of corruption*” because of that single deed (Rom 8:20-21). As for the effect of Adam’s sin (singular) upon humanity, this is what has been revealed.

- ⇒ **SIN ENTERED THE WORLD.** By means of that transgression, sin entered into the world (Rom 5:12a).
- ⇒ **DEATH ENTERED THE WORLD.** Death entered the domain of humanity by means of that single sin (Rom 5:12b).
- ⇒ **DEATH PASSED ON ALL MEN.** Death passed upon all men, being imposed upon them independent of their own will or action (Rom 5:12c).
- ⇒ **SIN REIGNED OVER THOSE WHO VIOLATED NO LAW.** Sin reigned over the progeny of Adam until Moses, even though they did not sin after the same manner as he did – infracting a law. Men die because of Adam’s sin, for there was no law from Adam to Moses (Rom 5:13-14).
- ⇒ **EVERY MEMBER OF THE HUMAN RACE DIES.** Because of the sin of Adam, all

of his generations are dead (5:15).

- ⇒ **JUDGMENT RESULTING IN THE CONDEMNATION OF ALL.** Adam’s sin brought judgment to condemnation throughout the entirety of the human race (5:16).
- ⇒ **DEATH REIGNS OVER HUMANITY TO THIS VERY DAY.** To this very day, death reigns because of Adam’s transgression (5:17).
- ⇒ **ONE SINNED, ALL ARE CONDEMNED.** By the offense of Adam, judgment came unto all “*to condemnation*” (5:18).
- ⇒ **ONE SINNED, MANY (ALL) MADE SINNERS.** By Adam’s single act of disobedience, “*many were made sinners*” (5:19).

And what was the sin that caused these devastating global effects? What deed was done that caused death to be imposed upon every person, every living thing, and the entirety of the domain of matter? It was eating a piece of fruit!



What human court would judge Adam’s sin to be worthy of such dire consequences? Apart from those who have been illuminated by God, what individual is there in all of history, or in all of the world, who would defend such a sweeping and unwavering judgment? To this very day, theologians haggle about Adam’s sin and its effects upon the human race. But God has spoken on the matter, and stamped his decision

throughout the entire domain of nature, and upon all who inhabit it.

Our text has exposed us to another judgment from God that does not appear to the flesh to match the sin committed. Those, however, who struggle with this do not know how serious sin is, and what is involved in committing the most apparently minor transgression.

A person has to rebel against God to sin – to commit any sin! When king Saul failed to carry out the commandment of the Lord, Samuel told him his sin was a display of “rebellion” and “*stubbornness*,” which were themselves akin to “*witchcraft*” and “*idolatry*” (1 Sam 15:23). Israel’s sin was said to have stemmed from being “*stiffnecked*,” and unwilling to turn (Ex 32:9). Their unwillingness to give heed to the Lord was a state identified as “*impudent and heardhearted*” (Ezek 3:7).

Modern Day counselors and psychologists have rendered a great disservice to the church by providing all manner of explanations for sin. In attempting to rationalize iniquity, they have muddied the waters, dulled ears, and hardened hearts.

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was addressed sternly because it, like all sin, was serious. But that condition is only made worse when the environment in which sin is committed is one in which the Lord has been working for good.

A MICROCOSM OF THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

This passage is a sort or micro-view of the day of judgment. Whereas the day of judgment will deal with all of the counsels of the heart, every word, and every deed, our text dealt with one counsel, one deed, and one lie. However, in those things all of the requirements of the day of judgment are revealed.

The Certainty of the Day of Judgment

When we speak of *“the day of judgment,”* we are not speaking theoretically. In the Gospels, Jesus refers to *“the day of judgment”* five times (Matt 10:15; 11:22,24; 12:36; Mk 6:11).

- ⇒ Sodom and Gomorrah will be at the day of judgment, together with the generations that followed (Matt 10:15; 11:24; Mk 6:11).
- ⇒ The citizens of Tyre and Sidon will be at the day of judgment, together with the generations that followed (Matt 11:22).
- ⇒ Men will give an account for *“every idle word”* in the day of judgment (Matt 12:36).

Jesus referred to the same occasion as *“the judgment”* four times (Matt 12:42; Lk 10:14; 11:31,32).

- ⇒ The queen of the South, or the Queen of Sheba, will be there, together with the generations that followed (Matt 12:42; Lk 11:31).
- ⇒ Tyre and Sidon will be there with the generations that followed (Lk 10:14).
- ⇒ The men of Nineveh will be there with the generations that followed (Lk 11:32).

The epistles refer to the certainty of the day of judgment, and the accounting that will take place at that time.

- ⇒ We will all *“stand before the judgment seat of Christ”* (Rom 14:10).
- ⇒ We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ *“to receive the things done in the body . . . whether it be good or bad”* (2 Cor 5:10).
- ⇒ It is appointed to men to die once, then appear at *“the judgment”* (Heb 9:27).
- ⇒ God knows *“how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished”* (2 Pet 2:9).

⇒ The present heavens and earth are *“reserved unto fire against”* [or for] *“the day of judgment”* (2 Pet 3:7).

⇒ Those living by faith and walking in the Spirit can *“have boldness in the day of judgment”* (1 John 4:17).

⇒ God has *“reserved”* the fallen angels *“in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day”* (Jude 1:6).

⇒ Solemnly men are told that God is going to *“judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance to all men, in that he hath raised Him from the dead”* (Acts 17:31).

In order for men to be convinced of the reality of the judgment, there are numerous examples in Scripture of the judgment of men while they remained in this world. This does not always happen when men sin against the Lord. This circumstance has caused some men to be

“But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds” (Rom 2:5-6).

For this reason, and no doubt many more, examples of God’s intolerance of sin are recorded for our learning. I have already listed numerous examples of such judgments, particularly those resulting in death, in the commentary of verse five, under the heading **“The Ungodly In the World Slain.”**

The case of Ananias and Sapphira provide some details of Divine judgment.

- ⇒ The fulness of the deed committed was made known (5:1-2).
- ⇒ The reason for the deed was revealed – Satan filled Ananias’ heart (5:3).
- ⇒ Exactly what was done was made public (5:3).

In order for men to be convinced of the reality of the judgment, there are numerous examples in Scripture of the judgment of men while they remained in this world. This does not always happen when men sin against the Lord. This circumstance has caused some men to be presumptuous, imagining that they will escape the judgment of God.

presumptuous, imagining that they will escape the judgment of God. Thus Solomon wrote, *“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil”* (Eccl 8:11). Others reason, *“Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”* (2 Pet 3:4). Because of the hardness of their hearts, such people do not know they are actually piling up a treasure of wrath that will be poured out upon them in the last day. This is why Paul wrote to presumptuous Christians,

- ⇒ The unreasonableness of the deed was made clear (5:4).
- ⇒ The agreement made between Ananias and Sapphira was made known (5:9).
- ⇒ The confirmation of Divine judgment was declared (5:9).

The day of judgment will be characterized by such details. It is then that the counsels of the heart will be revealed (1 Cor 4:5). The absurdity of sin will be proclaimed while others who had lesser advantages declare their superior

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example– by Given O. Blakely

responses during inferior times – like the queen of Sheba and the city of Nineveh.

It is no wonder the church is warned, *“For we must **all** appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. **Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences**”* (2 Cor 5:11). We must not adopt as view of God or of His purpose that ignores the reality of His intolerance of sin. One of the associations contained in the Gospel is that *“the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who **hold**”* [hinder,^{ASV} suppress,^{NKJV} keep down,^{BBE} detain,^{DOUAY} hold down,^{ERV}] *“the truth in*

unrighteousness”(Rom 1:18). That is, **“the truth” is inhibited by the presence of wickedness – particularly among those who claim identity with God!** That is precisely why the wrath of God is “against” all ungodliness and unrighteousness in men!

In an environment where the truth is being declared, such as that of our text, **those who remain hard hearted, seeking and doing their own will and ignoring the will of God, are taking their lives into their own hands.** There simply is too much in the Word of God about this for it to be doubted. Further, the church is to faithfully make this known.

In all ages, whether during the era of the Old Covenant, or in these latter days of the New Covenant, when the truth has not been proclaimed,

iniquity has become dominant. The ascendancy of sin further has a dampening effect upon what little truth is being proclaimed. A perusal of history will confirm this to be the case. Further, recovering from such times has always been a monumental work in which Divine working and influence was an absolute requirement.

No generation has ever recovered from a falling away by means of scholarship, discipline, or mere human organization. Renewal and recovery have always come by means of the declared truth – particularly that of the Gospel of Christ and the distinctions of the New Covenant. Where these proclamations were not in place, the professing church was locked into mediocrity and deadness. Liberty simply cannot be realized independently of the truth (John 8:32).

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 2/16/2007. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Twenty-second lesson will cover verses 12 through 16 of the fifth chapter: “DIVINE INFLUENCE.” Following the death of Ananias and Sapphira, there was an outbreak of extraordinary supernatural activity. Vast numbers of people were “added to the Lord,” and multitudes were brought into the streets so that, at the very least, the shadow of Peter might fall upon them. The sick were brought from the surrounding cities, and everyone of them was healed. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

*The Blakely Family: Given, June, Benjamin, and Eva
406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801*

A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

Telephone: (417) 782-3063, Email: Given (GivenB@aol.com) June: (JuneE01@aol.com)

ADAH’s Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/adah.htm> -- EVA’s Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/Eva.htm>

Benjamin (Bensvison@aol.com), Eva (Evablakely@aol.com)

Adah Hutchcraft (adahhutchcraft@hotmail.com), Jason Hutchcraft (preacherhutch@heatoncc.org)

WORD OF TRUTH Website: <http://wotruth.com>

WORD OF TRUTH FELLOWSHIP Website: <http://wotruth.com/wotf/wotindex.htm>

The first recorded sin in the church is judged quickly and harshly, leaving us an example– by Given O. Blakely

COMMENTARY on Hebrews: <http://wotruth.com/hebindex.htm>
COMMENTARY on Revelation: <http://wotruth.com/revelationindex.htm>
COMMENTARY on First John: <http://wotruth.com/1stjohnindex.htm>
COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>
COMMENTARY on Daniel: <http://wotruth.com/Daniel.htm>
COMMENTARY on Colossians: <http://wotruth.com/Colossians.htm>
COMMENTARY on Second Corinthians: <http://wotruth.com/2Corinthians.htm>
COMMENTARY on Acts: <http://wotruth.com/Acts.htm>

**THESE LESSONS ARE REGULARLY SENT
IN PRINTED AND AUDIO FORMS TO BRETHREN IN**

THE UNITED STATES: Missouri, Florida, Indiana, Illinois, Alabama, Ohio, North Carolina, South Dakota, Kansas, Maine, Arkansas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Texas.

FOREIGN COUNTRIES: Pakistan, Burkina Faso West Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Indonesia, Serbia, Ghana, Mauritius, Finland, Malawi, South Africa, Italy, India, and United Kingdom.