

CHAPTER 5

BEWARE OF THE ATTACKS FROM THE INSIDE!

Acts 4:32–5:16

Satan had failed completely in his attempt to silence the witness of the church. However, the enemy never gives up; he simply changes his strategy. His first approach had been to attack the church from the outside, hoping that arrest and threats would frighten the leaders. When that failed, Satan decided to attack the church *from the inside* and use people who were a part of the fellowship.

We must face the fact that Satan is a clever foe.

1. If he does not succeed as the “devouring lion” (1 Peter 5:8)
2. He attacks again as the “deceiving serpent” or an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:3, 13–14)

Satan is both a murderer and a liar (John 8:44), and the church must be prepared for both attacks.

The Generosity of the Believers (Acts 4:32–37)

The believers had prayed and God’s Spirit had filled them and given them new power. The church that depends on believing prayer will know the blessing of the Holy Spirit in its ministry.

How can we tell when a local church is really filled with the Spirit?

When you go back to the record of the first filling at Pentecost (Acts 2:44–47), you discover three outstanding characteristics of a Spirit-filled church.

1. It is unified (2:44, 46).

This is a God-given spiritual unity, not a man-made organizational uniformity. The church is an organism that is held together by life, and that life comes through the Holy Spirit.

- The church must be organized; for if an organism is not organized, it will die.

NOTE: When the organization starts to hinder spiritual life and ministry, then the church becomes just another religious institution that exists to keep itself going.

When the Holy Spirit is at work, God's people will be united in their: (Acts 4:32)

- doctrinal beliefs
- fellowship
- giving
- worship

2. A Spirit-filled church is magnified and will have "favor with all the people" (2:47)

In spite of the opposition of the rulers, the common people were drawn to the believers because something new and exciting was happening. When the religious leaders tried to silence the church, it was their fear of the people that restrained them (Acts 4:21; 5:26). Yes, a Spirit-filled church will have its enemies, but what the Lord is doing will attract the attention and the admiration of people who are hungry to know God.

3. A Spirit-filled church is multiplied, because the Lord will daily add new believers to the church (2:47)

Evangelism is not the work of a chosen few, but the daily delight and ministry of the whole congregation. In the early church, each member sought to be an effective witness for Jesus Christ, no matter where he happened to be. No wonder the church grew from 120 to over 5,000 in just a short time!

How did Satan's attack affect the spiritual condition of the church?

Not at all!

The fact that Peter and John were arrested, tried, and threatened had absolutely no effect on the spiritual life of the church, for the church was still.

- unified (Acts 4:32)
- magnified (Acts 4:33)
- multiplied! (Acts 4:32)

One evidence of the unity of the church was the way they sacrificed and shared with one another.

When the Holy Spirit is at work, giving is a blessing and not a burden.

We must keep in mind that this “Christian communism” was very unlike the political Communism. What the believers did was purely voluntary (Acts 5:4) and was motivated by love. No doubt many of the new believers were visitors in Jerusalem, having come for the feasts; and they had to depend on their Christian friends to help meet their daily needs.

Nor should we think that every believer sold all his goods and brought the money to the Apostles.

- **Acts 4:34.** indicates that some of the members “from time to time” sold various pieces of property and donated to the common treasury. When the assembly had a need, the Spirit directed someone to sell something and meet the need.

While the early church’s spirit of sacrifice and loving generosity is worthy of our emulation, believers today are not required to imitate these practices. The principles of Christian giving are outlined in the epistles, especially in 2 Corinthians 8–9; and nowhere are we instructed to bring our money and lay it at the pastor’s feet (Acts 4:35), as though he were an apostle. It is the *spirit* of their giving that is important to us today and not the “letter” of their system.

Joseph, nicknamed “Barnabas” (son of encouragement), is introduced at this point for several reasons.

1st – he was a generous giver and illustrated the very thing Luke was describing.

2nd – his noble act apparently filled Ananias and Sapphira with envy so that they attempted to impress the church with their giving and ended up being killed.

3rd – Barnabas had a most important ministry in the church and is mentioned at least twenty-five times in the Book of Acts and another five times in the epistles. In fact, it is Barnabas who encouraged Paul in his early service for the Lord (Acts 9:26–27; 11:19–30; 13:1–5), and who gave his cousin John Mark the encouragement he needed after his failure (Acts 13:13; 15:36–41; Col. 4:10).

Levites were not permitted to own land, so it is difficult to understand how Barnabas acquired the property that he sold. Perhaps that particular law (Num. 18:20; Deut. 10:9) applied only in Palestine and the property was in Cyprus, or perhaps the corrupt religious leaders had become lax in enforcing the law. There is much we do not know about Joseph Barnabas, but this we do know: he was a Spirit-filled man who was an encouragement to the church because he gave his all to the Lord.

Not every believer can be like Peter and John, but we can all be like Barnabas and have a ministry of encouragement.

The Hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11)

“Half of the misery in the world comes from trying to *look*, instead of trying to *be*, what one is not.”

— George MacDonald

The name that Jesus gave to this practice is “hypocrisy,” which simply means **“wearing a mask, playing the actor.”** We must not think that failure to reach our ideals is hypocrisy, because no believer lives up to all that he or she knows or has in the Lord.

Hypocrisy is *deliberate* deception, trying to make people think we are more spiritual than we really are.

- **Ananias** means “God is gracious,” but he learned that God is also holy
- **Sapphira** means “beautiful,” but her heart was ugly with sin

No doubt some people are shocked when they read that God killed two people just because they lied about a business transaction and about their church giving. But when you consider the features connected with this sin, you have to agree that God did the right thing by judging them.

It is worth noting that the Lord judges sin severely *at the beginning of a new period in salvation history*. Just after the tabernacle was erected, God killed Nadab and Abihu for trying to present “false fire” to the Lord (Lev. 10). He also had Achan killed for disobeying orders after Israel had entered the Promised Land (Josh. 7). While God was certainly not responsible for their sins, He did use these judgments as warnings to the people, and even to us (1 Cor. 10:11–12).

1. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was *energized by Satan* (Acts 5:3); and that is a serious matter.

If Satan cannot defeat the church by attacks from the outside, he will get on the inside and go to work (Acts 20:28–31). He knows how to lie to the minds and hearts of church members, even genuine Christians, and get them to follow his orders. We forget that the admonition about the spiritual armor (Eph. 6:10–18) was written to God’s people, not to unbelievers, because it is the Christians who are in danger of being used by Satan to accomplish his evil purposes.

Sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle which fits them all...

-- Oliver Wendell Holmes

John 8:44 -- Satan is a liar and a murderer

He lied *to* and *through* this couple, and the lie led to their deaths. When God judged Ananias and Sapphira, He was also judging Satan. He was letting everybody know that He would not tolerate deception in His church.

2. Their sin was *motivated by pride*, and pride is a sin that God especially hates and judges (Prov. 8:13).

No doubt the church was praising God for the generous offering that Barnabas had brought when Satan whispered to the couple, “You can also bask in this kind of glory! You can make others think that you are as spiritual as Barnabas!” Instead of resisting Satan’s approaches, they yielded to him and planned their strategy.

Matt. 6:1–4, 19–34 --

The Pharisees were adept at calling attention to their gifts, and they received the praises of men—but that’s all they received! Whatever we possess, God has given to us; we are stewards, not owners. We must use what He gives us for His glory alone.

John 5:44--

**** Daniel Defoe called pride “*the first peer and president of hell*”**

Indeed, it was pride that transformed Lucifer into Satan (Isa. 14:12–15), and it was pride (“Ye shall be as God!”) that caused our first parents to sin (Gen. 3). Pride opens the door to every other sin, for once we are more concerned with our reputation than our character, there is no end to the things we will do just to make ourselves “look good” before others.

3. Their sin was especially wicked. their sin was *directed against God’s church*.

We have reason to believe that Ananias and Sapphira were believers. The spiritual level of the church at that time was so high that it is doubtful that a mere “professor” could have gotten into the fellowship without being detected. The fact that they were able to lie to the Spirit (Acts 5:3) and tempt the Spirit (Acts 5:9) would indicate that they had the Spirit of God living within.

God loves His church and is jealous over it, for the church was purchased by the blood of God's Son (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25) and has been put on earth to glorify Him and do His work.

Had Peter not been discerning, Ananias and Sapphira would have become influential people in the church! Satan would have been working through them to accomplish his purposes!

The Church is:

1 Timothy 3:15 -- The church is "the pillar and ground of the truth"

1 Corinthians 3:16 -- The church is God's temple in which He dwells

2 Timothy 2:1-4 -- The church is God's army

The church is safe so long as Satan is attacking from the outside, but when he gets on the inside, the church is in danger.

It is easy for us to condemn Ananias and Sapphira for their dishonesty, but we need to examine our own lives to see if our profession is backed up by our practice

- Do we really mean everything we pray about in public?
- Do we sing the hymns and Gospel songs sincerely or routinely?

Matthew 15:8 -- "These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me"

If God killed "religious deceivers" today, how many church members would be left?

What is described in this chapter is not a case of church discipline. Rather it is an example of God's personal judgment.

"The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"

-- Hebrews 10:30-31

Had Ananias and Sapphira judged their own sin, God would not have judged them (1 Cor. 11:31), but they agreed to lie, and God had to deal with them.

Ananias was dead and buried, and Sapphira did not even know it! Satan always keeps his servants in the dark, while God guides His servants in the light (John 15:15). Peter accused her of tempting God's Spirit, that is, deliberately disobeying God and seeing how far God would go (Ex. 17:2; Deut. 6:16). They were actually defying God and daring Him to act—and He acted, with swiftness and finality. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matt. 4:7).

We must keep in mind that their sin was not in robbing God of money but in lying to Him and robbing Him of glory.

They were not required to sell the property; and, having sold it, they were not required to give any of the money to the church (Acts 5:4). Their lust for recognition conceived sin in their hearts (Acts 5:4, 9), and that sin eventually produced death (James 1:15).

Results.

A wave of godly fear that swept over the church and over all those who heard the story (Acts 5:11).

We have moved from "great power" and "great grace" (Acts 5:33) to "great fear," and all of these ought to be present in the church.

"Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire" -- Hebrews 12:28–29

The Ministry of the Apostles (Acts 5:12–16)

We have learned that the Spirit-filled church is:

1. Unified
2. Magnified
3. Multiplied.

Satan wants to:

1. Divide the church
2. Disgrace the church
3. Decrease the church

He will do it, if we let him.

But the church described here completely triumphed over the attacks of Satan!

The people were still unified (Acts 5:12), magnified (Acts 5:13), and multiplied (Acts 5:14).

Multitudes were added to the Lord, and for the first time, Luke mentions the salvation of women.

The mighty wonders performed by the Apostles were the fulfillment of the Lord's promise that they would do "greater works" in answer to believing prayer.

John 14:13–14 --

When Jesus performed miracles during His ministry on earth, He had three purposes in mind.

1. To show compassion and meet human need
2. To present His credentials as the Son of God
3. To convey spiritual truth

For example, when He fed the 5,000, the miracle met their physical need, revealed Him as the Son of God, and gave Him opportunity to preach a sermon about the Bread of Life (John 6).

The apostolic miracles followed a similar pattern. Peter and John healed the crippled beggar and met his need, but Peter used that miracle to preach a salvation sermon and to prove to the people and the council that he and John were indeed the servants of the living Christ.

And that is one miracle we can all participate in as we share the message of the Gospel, "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." -- Romans 1:16

Home Work

1. Why did the believers sell their goods to support others who were in want? (4.32)
2. How was this generosity related to 4.33?
3. What was the sin of Ananias?
4. What do you think was his motivation?
5. What did God teach the early believers by striking down Ananias and Sapphira?
6. Is there a lesson for us here?
7. Can you add anything to Page 24–25 of your notes?