



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V22 N3 January 19, 2020

REMEMBERSHIP

“reMEMBER Accountability”

Acts 5:1-11

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Biblical Community

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Acts 2:44-47



What does accountability look like?

We're all concerned about our appearance. Nobody wants to look bad — both *literally* and *figuratively* speaking. We all want to make a good impression. For example, *literally* speaking, we want to look *younger*. More drastic surgical measures to accomplish this include face lifts and tummy tucks. But for those who don't want to go under the knife or can't afford to go that far, there are scores of antiaging creams, cosmetic lotions, and hair color products guaranteed to take years off one's appearance. For some, looking good is more important than being healthy. We want to look *better off financially*, especially if our friends are better off financially. We spend more money than we can really afford to dress like they dress, dine where they dine, and in general, live like they live. For some, the accoutrements of life become more important than the necessities of life. We want to look more *important*. To do so we cozy up to important people, respected people who hold significant positions, with a view to developing strategic relationships. Professionals pad their resumes and promote their accomplishments. Others dress up their social media profile and never stop posting about themselves. For some, life's all about perception. Such is the breeding ground for a lot of other disingenuous and downright deceitful doings.

Figuratively speaking, we all want to look like we've got it together, personally and spiritually. Perhaps like Janus, the two-faced Roman god, we live two lives — a decent life when we're with other Christians and a dubious one when we're with the unchurched. Or perhaps, we hide our true selves from everyone, including our Christian brothers and sisters. After all, who wants others to know about their embarrassing fears, failures, and spiritual shortcomings? Writers on Christian spirituality have much to say about this hypocritical false self. Brennan Man-

ning writes about “the Imposter.” “To gain acceptance and approval, the false self suppresses or camouflages feelings, making emotional honesty impossible. Living out of the false self creates a compulsive desire to present a perfect image to the public so that everybody will admire us, and nobody will know us” (*Abba's Child*, 34).

His words are indicative of the Pharisees of Jesus' day, whose practice of spirituality was for the benefit of others. So much so that Jesus warned his disciples: “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Mt 6:1). Don't call attention to your giving, praying, and fasting.

Ananias and Sapphira are examples of early Christians who were desperate to look more charitable than they really were. They lied to God in an effort to deceive others into believing they were as generous as Barnabas, and it cost them their lives. Surprisingly, one commentator writes: “*Lying to the Holy Spirit is a sin that Christians commit frequently today*.” When Christians act hypocritically by pretending a devotion that is not theirs, or a surrender of life they have not really made, they lie to the Holy Spirit. If God acted today as He did in the early Jerusalem church, undertakers would have much more work than they do” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Acts,” 2019 ed., 129, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf, italics added).

We're much more nuanced than Ananias and Sapphira in our spiritual deception. When we receive a group text asking for prayer, why do we *reply all*? Why do we drop hints to others regarding our spiritual practices, string innumerable pious phrases together when we pray publicly, and paint spiritually flattering portraits of ourselves on social media? Perhaps, we need to take a serious second look at Jesus' warning to his disciples and heed it.

1 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2 With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

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

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

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

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

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

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

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Box "also" indicating *comparison* (i.e., "likewise") in v. 1.
- Circle "kept back" in v. 2.
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 2, 4.
- Bracket "filled your heart" in v. 3.
- Bracket "test the Spirit" in v. 9.
- Circle the "?" in vv. 4, 9.
- Highlight "great fear" in vv. 5, 11.
- Underline "whole church" in v. 11.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What is one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. The story of Ananias and Sapphira seems so “long ago and far away.” What makes it relevant today?
 2. The word “also” could be omitted from verse 1. What *purpose* does including it serve?
 3. Explain the *contrast* in verse 2.
 4. Satan’s influence on Ananias had a two-fold effect. Describe it. (See v. 3.)
 5. Give the implied answers to the *rhetorical* questions in verse 4.
 6. “Great fear seized all who heard what had happened” (v. 5). Are we talking *reverential awe* or *dreadful terror*? Explain.
 7. Compare Peter’s encounter with Ananias with his encounter with Sapphira, and identify the implications.
 8. What does the practically *immediate* burial of Ananias and Sapphira indicate?
 9. The “great fear” that seized the whole church must have had consequences. What do you suppose they were?
 10. **Discussion:** Lying to God sounds serious. Does it still go on today? Talk about it.
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Commentary On The Text

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is jarring. One commentator observes: “If Barnabas was a positive example of the community’s sharing, the story of Ananias and Sapphira provides a sharp contrast. They too sold a piece of property, pledging the proceeds to the community of believers. But they held back part of the proceeds; and a terrible judgment followed, resulting in both their deaths. Perhaps no passage in Acts raises more serious difficulties for Christian readers. The judgment on these two seems so harsh, so non redemptive, so out of keeping with the gospel” (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 155).

And yet, read in its historical context, the judgment is understandable. The selling of possessions and the caring unity of the early church represented the disciples’ wholehearted obedience to Jesus’ teaching (cf., Lk 12:33; 18:22). Another commentator writes: “In Luke the disciples were quarrelsome, disputing among themselves who was the greatest, and Jesus corrected them (9:46-48; 22:24-27). In Acts, however, the apostles act as a unified group (cf. 2:14; 5:29; 6:2-4), and there is distinct emphasis on the heartfelt unity of the whole community, demonstrated in acts of sharing. In place of factiousness there is ‘one heart and soul’ (Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, vol. 2, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 46). Ananias and Sapphira threatened the Spirit-filled unity of the community by their counterfeit expression of generosity.

The plot unfolds in two parallel scenes: Peter’s confrontation of Ananias (vv. 1-6) and his confrontation of Sapphira (vv. 7-11). Peter is doing the confronting because he is the spokesman for the apostles, to whom the community’s funds were entrusted (cf., 4:35). The setting of the story is found in verses 1-2. In this case, the setting is *circumstantial* rather than *physical* or *temporal*. Instead of telling us where or when events take place, Luke tells us the circumstances leading up to them. The word “also” in verse 1 is key in this regard because it links this story by way of *contrast* to the previous one about Barnabas (4:36-37). His unique generosity serves as a foil to magnify the sinister nature of Ananias’ and Sapphira’s deceit. In scene one, Ananias brings money from the sale of a piece of property he and Sapphira owned and puts it at the apostles’ feet. In other words, he turns it over to the apostles to distribute to those in need. Immediately, Peter sees through his deception, claiming that under the influence of Satan, he has pilfered part of the pledged proceeds from the sale and has simultaneously lied to the Holy Spirit. Peter’s questions in verse 4 make it clear that the nei-

ther the gift itself nor its size was the problem. The land belonged to Ananias before it was sold; he didn’t have to sell it. The money from the sale was his; he didn’t have to donate it. The problem was deceit. He tried to have it both ways. He tried to deceive people into believing he was generous like Barnabas, while, unlike Barnabas, keeping some of the money for himself. With the sound of apostle’s words still ringing in his ears, Ananias drops dead and his body is hastily carried away and buried. It’s a miracle of judgment that leaves people in fear knowing that God is near.

Scene two amounts to a sequel involving Sapphira, her husband’s coconspirator. Only this time, Peter gives her an opportunity to come clean. Peter asks her, “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?” He must have quoted the amount her husband donated. Not knowing what had happened to him, she answers, “Yes, that is the price.” Appalled by her answer, Peter reveals she will share the fate of her husband. How could the two of them believe they would get away with testing the Spirit of the Lord? At the very moment the men who buried Ananias returned, she drops dead, and finding her dead, they carry her away and bury her beside her husband. Two deaths on the same day under the same miraculous circumstances leave the whole Jerusalem church in fear.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira and their fate lies outside of our contemporary church experience—for which we can be truly thankful. Who would want to be on the receiving end of a *judgment miracle*? What’s more, what happened to Ananias and Sapphira happened to them alone, so what can the isolated experience of two people so long ago and so far away have to do with Christians today? What happened then doesn’t happen now, so what are Luke’s contemporary readers to take away from this passage?

While the story is obviously about money and giving, it’s not really about stewardship and generosity. Although greed may have had a hand in it, it’s more about the desire to look good *spiritually* in the eyes of others and the wrongheaded, hypocritical attempt of one couple to do so. And people are the same today as they were in the first century, Christian people included. In an attempt to look as generous as Barnabas, Ananias and Sapphira conspired misrepresent what they had done. They conspired to lie to the congregation oblivious to the fact that they were lying to God. We are tempted to do the same kind of thing, namely, live dishonestly. Whenever we hypocritically try to make others believe that we are more virtuous, more significant, more spiritual than we really are, we have followed in the footsteps of Ananias and Sapphira.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 *also*

The adverb “also” links this narrative about Ananias and Sapphira to the previous one about Barnabas, contrasting this one with that one, contrasting the actions of Ananias and Sapphira with those of Barnabas. See “but” indicating *contrast* in v. 2. “The story flows on immediately from the preceding account of Joseph Barnabas’ generosity, the antecedent making the action of Ananias and Sapphira all the more blameworthy” (James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 63). “In contrast to Barnabas stands the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira” (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 219).

v. 2 *kept back*

“The verb for ‘kept back’ (*enosphisato*) is the same used for Achan’s act in holding the spoil in Jericho (Josh. 7:1). It is a verb tied to financial fraud (2 Macc. 4:32; Johnson 1992: 88; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.8.29 §274)” (Bock, 221). “Ananias had evidently sold a piece of land, like Barnabas, and also like Barnabas had pledged the full proceeds to the community. This can be assumed from the use of a rare Greek verb (*nosphizomai*, v. 2) to *pilfer*, to *purloin*, to *embezzle*. One does not embezzle one’s own funds but those of another, in this instance those that rightfully belonged to the common Christian fund . . . One must assume either that the practice of the community was always to pledge the full proceeds of a sale or that Ananias and Sapphira *had made such a pledge with regard to the sale of the field*” (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 156, italics added). The fact that Peter accused them of lying to God suggests the latter.

v. 3 *filled your heart*

“This is a good example of the Greek verb *fill* (*plhrow*) meaning ‘to exercise control over someone’s thought and action’ (cf. Eph 5:18)” (*The NET Bible*, 3sn on Ac 5:3). “Satan filled, and the result was the lie. This filling is the opposite of earlier community fillings, of being filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 13:52; 19:21)” (Bock, 222).

vv. 4, 9 ?

The questions in these verses appear to be *rhetorical*. “Peter reminded Ananias that he had been under no compulsion (v. 4). He did not have to sell his land. Even if he sold it, he still could have retained the proceeds. The act of dedicating the land to the community was strictly voluntary. Once pledged, however, it became a wholly different matter. It had been dedicated to the community. In lying about the proceeds, he had broken a sacred trust. Ultimately, he had lied to God” (Polhill, 158).

vv. 5, 11 *great fear*

The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira had a sobering effect on the church, to say the least! “The note about the fear that came upon all who heard about it, however, would indicate that they at least saw the hand of God in it all” (Polhill, 158). “As in verse 5, great fear is reported for those who hear of these things. This is not merely respect but a healthy awareness that God is present and can act in judgment (Luke 1:12, 65; 2:9; 7:16; 8:37; Acts 2:43; 19:17).

vv. 6, 10 *buried*

“When a man had been struck down by the hand of Heaven (as Joshua specifically says was the case with Achan: Josh. 7.25) his corpse must surely be consigned rapidly and silently to the grave. No one should mourn him. The suicide, the rebel against society, the excommunicate, the apostate, and the criminal condemned to death by the Jewish court would be buried . . . in haste and without ceremonial, and no one might (or need) observe the usual lengthy and troublesome rituals of mourning for him” (J. D. M. Derrett, “Ananias, Sapphira, and the Right of Property,” in *Studies in the New Testament Volume One*, 198).

v. 9 *test the Spirit*

“‘Putting God to the test’ means seeing how far one can go in disobeying God—in this case lying to Him—before He will judge (cf. Deut. 6:16; Matt. 4:7). This is very risky business” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Acts,” 2019 ed., 131, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf). “This time the expression was not of lying to the Spirit but of testing him, to see how far he would go in his tolerance. Not very far, was Peter’s answer” (Polhill, 159).

v. 11 *whole church*

“An identifiable religious community is emerging from those who have responded to Jesus, those who earlier were called brethren (1:15) and believers (2:44; 4:32). Later in Acts, members of this group are called disciples (6:1), the saints of the Lord (9:13), and Christians (11:26; Schneider 1980: 377). *Ekklesia* here refers to the local community of the church as a gathering . . . Later it will be used of the church as a collection of distinct local communities distributed worldwide (20:28)” (Bock, 227). Paul also uses the term to refer to the body of Christ made up of all believers indwelt by the Spirit (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18, 24).

Other Texts to Consider

Matthew 6:1

“‘Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.’”



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Don't fool yourself into thinking that God can be fooled by you hypocritically parading your piety past others to be seen and recognized by them.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

I had my kids convinced at a very young age that I knew everything they did, and if I didn't, a neighbor would fill me in. Kids stretch the truth; they just do. Whether they're testing the boundaries, avoiding punishment, or simply trying to get attention, they will experiment with lying. One of our favorite things to laugh about as a family is how our kids acted when they were younger and got caught in a lie. One would try to weasel their way out of getting busted with an absurd lie. When another child would lie, their eyes would roam all over the place, so we knew they were trying to pull a fast one. Still another would get caught and when we asked for the truth they would immediately come clean to avoid the harsher punishment. Lastly, one always burst out in tears of confession before they were ever caught. Parenting truly takes a village. I need all the extra eyes and ears of a helpful and loving Biblical community to raise these kids to God's glory. I need my friends and neighbors to tell me what's being said or done during carpool, practice, sleepovers and small group. We weren't meant to do this parenting thing alone! I encourage you today to reach out and get connected in community. Plug into a group that will commit to walking this parenting journey with you and ask them to help you and your kids stay on the right path. We are praying for you this week!

What Does The Bible Say?

What does the Bible say? Read Acts 5:1-11

1. What did Ananias and Sapphira sell?
2. How did they lie? Who did they lie to?
3. What happened to them both?

What Do You Think?

Did Ananias and Sapphira have to give all their money to the church? How could they have handled this differently?

What Do You Do?

What kind of difference would it have made if their friends knew their plan?

CORE COMPETENCY: Biblical Community

I spend time with other Christians to help with God's work.

MEMORY VERSE: Hebrews 10:24

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week's verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME _____

GRADE _____

PARENT SIGNATURE _____

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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