

## **Hypocrisy Is Lying at the Door**

Acts 5:1-11

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One of the sins people seem to despise more than any other sin in the lives of others is that of hypocrisy. How it really irritates us when we see people pretending to be someone that we know they are not. And yet are we as critical of the hypocrisy in our own lives? Do we see all too clearly the hypocrisy in others, but conveniently overlook our own hypocrisy? Do you really want to see your hypocrisy so that you might turn from it? That is where true repentance must begin.

Perhaps the greatest objection against Christians that is hurled more often than any other is that the Church has hypocrites in it. Well that is true—there are indeed hypocrites in the Visible Church of Jesus Christ. Just as there are hypocrites in school, hypocrites in government, hypocrites in homes, hypocrites at work, hypocrites among atheists and every religious group; so there are hypocrites in the Church. Wherever you look, there are those who play a role for others to see, but who are quite different when they are alone or at home and don't have to maintain that disguise and mask until they are in public once again.

Dear ones, there is a difference between one who commits the sin of hypocrisy and one who lives as an unrepentant hypocrite; just as there is a difference between one who commits the sin of idolatry and one who lives as an unrepentant idolater. The Apostle Peter committed the sin of hypocrisy in Galatians 2 (where he once kept fellowship and ate with the Gentiles, but stopped doing so when Jewish Christians from Jerusalem appeared in Antioch, Galatians 2:11-13). Peter was justified and repented of his sin. Peter was not a hypocrite, but he did fall into the sin of hypocrisy. Christians do fall into the sin of hypocrisy—but Christians also repent of the sin of hypocrisy. On the other hand, Judas Iscariot (one of the twelve) was an unrepentant hypocrite who was never justified and was never a child of God, but was the son of perdition according to John 17:12 (just as is true of the Pope of Rome, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). The harshest condemnation issued by the Lord Jesus was not against those who knew they were sinners (like the tax collectors and the prostitutes), but was leveled against unrepentant hypocrites, who pretended to be so pious outwardly, but inwardly were proud and self-righteous looking for the approval of men rather than humbly looking in faith to Christ as their only righteousness before God (Matthew 23:25-28).

We are confronted in Acts 5 with two unrepentant hypocrites, Ananias and Sapphira, and the Holy Spirit reveals to us this sin that we might not be those who simply look at others as falling into the sin of hypocrisy, but may be on constant watch they we ourselves not do so, and in so doing deceive ourselves into believing that it is no big deal. This historical account in Acts 5 makes it very clear that God hates hypocrisy wherever it is found (in your life or mine). And most importantly, Jesus died to save hypocrites who will trust in Him and repent of their sin, just as He died to save idolaters, adulterers, murderers, and thieves—there is forgiveness in Jesus Christ for all sinners who come in faith casting themselves upon Him. The main points from our text this Lord's Day are the following: (1) The Church Has Hypocrites (Acts 5:1-2); (2) Hypocrites Cannot Hide from God (Acts 5:3-4,7-9); (3) Hypocrites Cannot Flee from God's Judgment (Acts 5:5,10-11).

### **I. The Church Has Hypocrites (Acts 5:1-2).**

A. We have just heard of the wondrous work of God's Spirit in the lives of believers within the Church of Jerusalem (in Acts 4), wherein was displayed such a tender love for brothers and sisters in Christ that when a dire need arose within the Church those who owned property willingly sold it and brought the

money to the Church that the apostles might disperse it to the needy brethren. One of those within the Church of Jerusalem that was notable for his care of the needy was Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37).

1. Barnabas exemplified the words of Christ in Luke 14:33.
2. However, here in Acts 5:1, we are met with a significant contrast in the word, “But”.

Whereas Barnabas was a trophy of God’s wondrous grace in humbly and sacrificially giving to the kingdom of God (not to gain the approval of man, but to show forth his love for Christ and the brethren), here the Holy Spirit now contrasts Barnabas with a married couple (Ananias and Sapphira) who conspired together to play the role of a Barnabas, but who actually were more like Judas Iscariot in giving to the kingdom of God in order to be seen and rewarded by men and in order to gain for themselves.

B. At the very outset when such displays of God’s work of grace and power in the Church were so evident, there appear tares among the wheat—unrepented hypocrites who seek to deceive the Church for their own self-centered gain. Ananias and Sapphira no doubt saw how Barnabas was looked upon by the apostles and others for his selfless donation, and they coveted the same attention as well. Perhaps Ananias thought that such a display of generosity would win him some special place of service (perhaps an office in the Church).

C. Let’s consider what Ananias and Sapphira actually conspired together to do.

1. They agreed together to sell a “possession” (piece of property) and to keep for themselves a certain portion of the profit while pretending as though it was the full amount that was actually laid at the feet of the apostles to be dispersed to the needy. In doing so, they lied not only to the apostles and to the Church, but also they lied to the Holy Spirit who is Christ’s representative within the Church. They said one thing, but actually did another thing. Thus, **they were guilty of lying to God.**

2. **They were also guilty of covetousness** in that they craved the attention, respect, office, grace, and gifts of Barnabas and others for their own selfish gain and profit. Even though what they gave might be used to help others in need, the real reason behind their gift was to make themselves look good before others in the Church. It is necessary to see that behind their hypocrisy was the sinful desire to have what others had—to be exalted, to be rewarded, and to gain the approval of men. They were looking for personal gain. That is always true of hypocrites.

D. Dear ones, what was the chief sin lying behind the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira?

1. Yes, **they lied** and **they coveted**, but I submit **it was pride** that was at the root of their lying hypocrisy and their coveting hypocrisy. It was all about them, and not about God. It was all about love for self, and not love for Christ or the brethren. It was all about their own glory, rather than the glory of the Lord.

2. Oh, how our pride looks for ways to exalt ourselves in the eyes of others—to sulk like little children because we did not receive the praise of others that someone else did. Oh, how our pride is willing even to put a brother/sister down (if necessary) in order to make ourselves look better in the eyes of others. Proud hypocrisy, lying hypocrisy, and covetous hypocrisy is always competing with others (everyone is a rival, rather than rejoicing in the gifts and graces of others). God be merciful to us; for if our pride is not checked by a humble, repentant confession and seeking from the Lord forgiveness, it will grow into full blown hypocrisy in living a double life—one way in public and another way in secret (as with Ananias and Sapphira, Judas, and Balaam).

E. What follows when the pride of hypocrisy, the lying of hypocrisy, and the covetousness of hypocrisy is not confessed with a godly sorrow looking to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus?

1. An indifference to hypocrisy in our lives will grow to such an extent that we are not even

pricked in our consciences that we are merely going through the motions of our faith, that our love for Jesus is cold, and that our obedience is simply a mere outward obedience.

2. Then that callousness to hypocrisy in our lives will lead to self-deception wherein we justify our hypocrisy **by comparing ourselves to others who are more hypocritical than are we** (I'm not like those charlatans on TV), or **by comparing ourselves with others whose lives are more notorious for sin than are we** (I'm not like my neighbor who cheats on his wife, wastes his money on toys, and parties with the boys), or **by simply counting the ways in our own minds the ways we help others and generally keep the commandments of God** (like the Pharisees). Dear ones, once you have been given over to self-delusion in believing then that you are a good person, a good Christian because of your mere outward obedience, you are ripe to becoming an repentant hypocrite because you live a life of continually justifying yourself in your hypocrisy.

F. What can we do that we fall not into in hypocrisy nor live therein?

1. **Grow in the gospel.** You are united to Christ and to all His benefits—you died to sin, and are alive to righteousness. Do not become a stranger to Christ by little or no communion with Christ by not enjoying Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ demands that you hate hypocrisy in your life (rather than being indifferent) and that you understand that you cannot uproot the sin of hypocrisy without Christ.

2. **Seek the grace of humility** whenever you see pride raising its ugly head in your life. Practice a godly replacement therapy (replace pride with humility).

3. **Examine your heart** for pride, for hypocrisy, for inconsistencies/contradictions, for lying, for covetousness, for discontentment, for jealousy (Psalm 139:23-24).

4. **Practice the presence of God** who knows all and sees all. Nothing can be hidden from Him (Psalm 44:20-21). If you can lie, steal, and cheat at work and yet think everything is fine when you approach God in worship, then you treat God as one of those from whom you have stolen and you believe you can lie and cheat God and get away with it. But God will not be deceived or mocked with such hypocrisy (Galatians 6:7). If we play the hypocrite with our neighbor whom we can see, we will also play the hypocrite with God whom we cannot see.

5. **Think often about your own death.** For we need to be reminded that we will not live long in these mortal bodies and that everything in this life will soon pass away. Since this life vanishes so soon, how can we afford to play games with God and to go through the mere motions of faith in light of our approaching death (Psalm 90:12)?

6. **Think often about the final judgment.** Dear ones, there is coming a day when all that is in our hearts will be revealed and uncovered by God (2 Corinthians 5:10). How foolish for us to think that we can forever hide our hypocrisy. Now is the time to be perfectly honest with Christ and to stop pretending and going through the motions of Christianity.

## II. Hypocrites Cannot Hide from God (Acts 5:3-4,7-9).

A. Hypocrites act as though God does not hear or see them in secret or is no more than a man in seeing only their outward behavior.

1. This was certainly true of Ananias and Sapphira, but notice what God says through Peter to Ananias (Acts 5:3-4) and to Sapphira (Acts 5:7-9).

2. Can you imagine the panic and shock that suddenly overwhelmed them both as they heard Peter reveal to them what they had planned in secret and what was buried in their own hearts? Dear ones, nothing can be hid from the Lord—they could not, nor can we.

B. I submit that Ananias and Sapphira were not regenerate Christians who fell into hypocrisy (as do all of God's elect to varying degrees), but rather they were a stark contrast to a true believer (Barnabas)—they were unrepentant hypocrites.

1. Peter says that Satan filled their hearts (Acts 5:3). Satan sifted Peter like wheat (Luke 22:31), but Satan entered into Judas (John 13:27). Redeemed Christians in the Church of Jerusalem were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31), but Ananias was filled with Satan (Acts 5:3).

2. Ananias and Sapphira were unrepentant hypocrites like Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-13,18-24). Satan may lead the elect of God into temptation and they may fall into sin, but he cannot fill them or control them because greater is He that is in them than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

3. When Peter reveals their sin, they give no indication of repentance from the text.

C. Before leaving this second main point, observe that Peter makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is God and not an impersonal force or power of God. The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

1. Note the parallel statements by Peter as to whom it was that Ananias lied: he lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3); he lied to God (Acts 5:4).

2. Note also that they tested the Spirit of God by acting as though they could pull the wool over the eyes of God's Spirit (Acts 5:9). We do the same thing when we act as though God doesn't see us in our secret sins or sins of the heart, or when we challenge the power, sovereignty, love, mercy, or goodness of God (Psalm 78:17-19). When we place ourselves in tempting situations, and then cry out to the Lord to rescue us, we are putting God to the test.

### III. Hypocrites Cannot Flee from God's Judgment (Acts 5:5,10-11).

A. When Ananias and Sapphira heard the words of Peter, they perished on the spot. This was the work of God. Peter did not even touch Ananias or Sapphira. God gave to His Church a visual lesson as to what will befall the unrepentant hypocrite. This temporal judgment is simply a foretaste of the everlasting judgment that will befall all unrepentant hypocrites like Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, and Simon the sorcerer (Revelation 21:6-8—a hypocrite is a liar). The "great fear" that fell upon all the church (Acts 5:11) was not bad—it was good. Those in the church were reminded that they could not mock God or lie to God by pretending to be a devoted Christian when their hearts were far away from the Lord. The Church of Jerusalem needed and we too need to grow in the fear of the Lord—to take our great God seriously, and to hold Him in awe and wonder.

B. Dear ones, hypocrites are in the Visible Church of Christ (those who profess the true religion and their children), but not in the Invisible Church of Christ (the elect and redeemed of God). That was the point of the Parable of the Tares (the enemy sows tares within the Visible Church throughout the world among those who profess faith in Christ and are baptized). There are both tares and wheat growing in the same Church.

1. Unrepentant hypocrites may be willing to give to the church; they may be willing to offer external worship according to certain forms; and they may even be willing to fast and go without food for a day. All these things they are willing to give up so as to be seen by others as righteous, but there is one thing a hypocrite is not willing to sacrifice nor to give up to God—his heart, his will, his mind, and his affections. An unrepentant hypocrite is not willing to examine himself to see if he is in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).

2. Dear ones, God has not given to you the example of Ananias and Sapphira so that you who trust alone in Jesus alone for your justification might live in doubt of your salvation. One is not a hypocrite who struggles and battles against hypocrisy and inconsistency in his/her own life. One is a hypocrite who stops struggling and warring against hypocrisy and inconsistencies in his/her life. One is not a hypocrite

who is transparent before the Lord about his/her hypocrisy (the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, Luke 18:10ff).

3. Dear ones, you will learn not to run from such spiritual examination no matter what sin is exposed because your faith is not (and never can be) in your own righteousness, but is always in the righteousness of your Savior. And as you grow in understanding His everlasting love for you (His redeemed ones) in the gospel, you will also grow in not fearing that examination, but will realize that God only reveals your sin, your hypocrisy, your lies, your covetousness, your double-standards because He loves you and wants those sins taken to the cross of Jesus to be crucified, and wants you to be growing to look more and more like His own beloved Son, Jesus Christ. It is because we are assured of God's eternal love for us that we can pray and sing with David the words of Psalm 139:23-24: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Amen.

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