

In considering vv32-37 last week, of chapter 4, I mentioned that the first 11 verses of chapter 5 better relate to chapter 4. This is seen in the first word of chapter 5:1, "But." In contrast to Joses (or Barnabas) in the previous chapter, Ananias and Sapphira are tragic examples of deception and judgment. And so, I want to consider this account under three headings: Deception (vv1-2); Confrontation (vv3-4); and Judgment (vv5-11).

- I. Deception (vv1-2)
- II. Confrontation (vv3-4)
- III. Judgment (vv5-11)

I. Deception (vv1-2)

1. Before I come more directly to their deception, I want to take a few minutes and explain who these two people are.
2. We are introduced to them in v1 as "a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife"—this is all we are told of them.
3. The name Ananias is Hebrew and means "the Lord is gracious," and Sapphira is also Hebrew and means "beautiful."
4. Thus, the only three things we are told about them are: they were Hebrews, married, and somewhat wealthy.
5. John Dick—"It is evident, that Ananias and Sapphira were numbered among the disciples; and there is no reason to doubt, that they were admitted to enjoy all the external privileges of the Church. As their conduct shows them not to have been sincere, we are led to inquire, by what motive they were induced to connect themselves with a society, which held out no allurements to the worldly passions; and the inquiry may be extended to many others, who, without experiencing the saving power of the truth, have since assumed the Christian profession, and even possess some measure of zeal for religion."
6. The Greek word rendered "a possession" at the end of v1, literally refers to a sizeable field or a vineyard.
7. In other words, the land they sold brought in a considerable amount of money—this wasn't a small transaction.
8. V2—"And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet."
9. Now we are not told how much he made from the sale, nor are we told how much he kept or gave donated.
10. The Greek word rendered "kept back" usually has negative connotations to it—it's elsewhere rendered "pilfered."
11. The word brings with it the idea of taking something secretly for personal gain—to pilfer or embezzle.
12. Now, as we shall see more fully in v4, the issue wasn't that they kept some of the proceeds, but that they did so deceitfully.
13. Seemingly, they were people of some means, and could have given donated the money to the church in full.
14. But they wanted to hoard the money, and give the appearance of generosity—these were the roots of their deception.
15. Bruce Milne—"Ananias had deliberately presented his gift as if it was the full payment for his property, no doubt relishing the praise, and the moral and spiritual credit, which accrued to him in the eyes of the community; but in fact, all the while he had deceitfully kept back a portion of the

total for his own use. In other words, he had deliberately tried to deceive the apostles and the church fellowship. He had lied, to men, and worse, to God."

16. (1) Charity must be done in the right way—that is, joyfully and willingly—this is the proper disposition.
17. 2Cor.9:7—"So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."
18. (2) Charity must be done for the right reasons—these are two—the good of others and glory of God.
19. This is why Christians are charitable—they give of their possessions to help others and to glorify God.
20. Now, if the only right reasons for charity are the good of men and glory of God, this condemns other reasons.
21. We are not to give for our own glory—we are not to give to make us look good or to receive man's praise.
22. Matt.6:1—"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward from your Father in heaven."

## II. Confrontation (vv3-4)

1. Verses 3-4 describe Peter's confrontation of Ananias, whereas vv8-9 describe a similar confrontation with Sapphira.
2. The first thing I need to say about Peter's confrontation is that it's supernatural—that is, God gave him supernatural knowledge about the situation.
3. There's no indication that someone told on Ananias; Peter simply exposes his deception with special insight.
4. And so, in confronting Ananias (and by inference Sapphira), Peter basically affirms three truths: Satanic influence, moral responsibility, and personal ownership.
5. (1) He affirms Satanic influence, v3—"But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?'"
6. Peter uses similar language Luke uses throughout the book of Acts with reference to being filled with the Spirit (4:31).
7. To be filled with the Spirit is to be influenced by the Spirit—it's to be under His influence, sway and effect.
8. Thus, to have our hearts filled with Satan is to be influenced by Satan—to be under his sway or influence.
9. Now, I want you to notice the results of this influence is to lie—"why has Satan filled your heart to lie."
10. This was Satan's goal or purpose—he intended to influence Ananias so that he would lie to the Holy Spirit.
11. Jn.8:44—"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."
12. This of course is in contrast to the Holy Spirit, who influences people so that they can plainly tell the truth.
13. The apostles were filled with the Spirit (4:31), and they spoke the truth; Ananias was filled with Satan and lied.
14. But before I go further, I need to address the fact, that Peter said Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit—how did He lie to the Holy Spirit?

15. Didn't he lie to the apostles? Well, I think the end of v4 provides the answer—"You have not lied to men but to God."
16. This doesn't mean that he didn't lie against men. He did. But it means that he ultimately sinned against God.
17. This sounds similar to David's confession in Ps.51:4—"Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight."
18. Again, this doesn't deny that David sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah—but he ultimately sinned against God.
19. Thus, we learn this basic principle—all sin is ultimately against God, because it's a violation of His law.
20. In lying, Ananias broke the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment (you shall not bear false witness), and so, he sinned against God.
21. Furthermore, let me point out in passing, that Luke here expressly affirms the deity of the Holy Spirit (to lie against the HS is to lie against God).
22. (2) He affirms moral responsibility, v4b—"Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."
23. Here Peter makes very clear—regardless of how Satan was involved, Ananias was responsible for his actions.
24. "Why have you conceived this thing in your heart"—Peter speaks of the sin as if it were a child conceived in the womb of his heart.
25. But notice who conceived it—"Why have you conceived this thing in your heart"—he conceived it in his own heart.
26. While Satan filled him and influenced or tempted him, it was Ananias who conceived the sin in his heart.
27. (3) He affirms personal ownership, v4a—"While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?"
28. In other words, it was his to do with it as he saw fit—he could have kept it or sold it, it was his to decide.
29. Or else, he could have sold it and gave half of the proceeds to the church—again, that was his to decide.
30. Strictly speaking, the issue wasn't him keeping some of the proceeds, but doing so in a deceitful manner.
31. Thus, before we move onto our third main heading, I want to focus upon the subject of temptation and sin (and in doing so, I want to consider three important words: temptation, conception, and transgression).
32. (a) Temptation—now to be honest, the actual term "tempt" or "temptation" isn't found in this passage.
33. But remember, Satan is mentioned, and the Scriptures describe him as a source of temptation (1Cor.7:5 – 'and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you').
34. Thus, to tempt is to entice to sin—this is what Paul meant in 1Cor.7:5—Satan tempts Christians to sin.
35. Now, admittedly precisely how Satan does this is a mystery—we know from the NT he uses spiritual forces in high places (that is, a host of other fallen angels called demons, who control this evil world).
36. Thus, we learn that Satan tempts or entices Christians to sin, through demons who control this evil age.
37. But, because these temptations are ultimately from Satan, the great tempter, they are directly ascribed to him.

38. It's for this reason, Peter can say to Ananias—"Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit."
39. That is—Why have you allowed Satan to tempt or entice you to commit this great transgression or sin?
40. (b) Conception—while Satan can tempt Christians to sin, it's not sin unless (until) it's first been conceived.
41. It's for this reason, the temptation must be rejected or dismissed, instead of being complied with or fulfilled.
42. Let me put like this—just as two things are needed for physical conception, two things are needed for conception of sin (temptation and consent).
43. Eph.6:16—"Above all, take the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one."
44. Jas.4:7—"Resist the devil and he will flee from you"—resist his temptations without giving consent.
45. (c) Transgression—now, here I need to clarify—if we consent to a temptation within our hearts, it's still sin.
46. But, while sin in the heart is still sin, it's worse if we act upon that sin, and allow it to find expression in our life.
47. So by transgression here, I refer to open transgression—any sin that's found expression through word or deed.
48. Jas.1:13-15—"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when it is full-grown, brings forth death."
49. (a) Temptation—God cannot tempt or entice us to sin because it's contrary to His holy and righteous nature.
50. We are tempted when we are drawn away by our own desire and enticed—our flesh is our greatest tempter.
51. Can a temptation originate from without Yes! As I've already said, Satan and/or others can tempt us.
52. But, and this is very important to understand, all Satan and others can do is tempt us to tempt ourselves.
53. Thus, every time we sin, we ultimately have no one to blame but ourselves, because we've allowed them to tempt us to tempt ourselves to sin.
54. (b) Conception—"when desire (lust) has conceived"—that is, when desire and consent (within the heart) meet.
55. A person has failed to resist or quench the temptation, but has mingled it with his or her, own consent.
56. And remember, regardless if it goes no further than our hearts it's still sin—it's sin in embryonic stage.
57. (c) Transgression—"it gives birth to sin"—this refers to giving expression to sin through word and deed.
58. You've not only conceived it within our heart, but you've acted upon it within your life and given birth to it.
59. James then continues the same imagery, by describing sin as a baby that grows up and becomes full-grown.
60. This simply means, if left unchecked, sin becomes a pattern in one's life, that will ultimately lead to death.

61. Let me illustrate these three steps within Ananias—he was first tempted by Satan to be deceptive and lie.
62. He gave into that temptation and conceived sin within his heart—he then gave birth to that sin and lied about.

### III. Judgment (vv5-11)

1. Within vv5-11, we have God's judgment upon Ananias (vv5-6), and then God's judgment upon Sapphira (vv7-11).
2. And so, I want to combine these into two points—the nature of God's judgment, and the results of God's judgment.
3. (1) Its nature, v5—"Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last" v6—"And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him" v10—"Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband."
4. (a) It was physical—by this I mean, God killed both Ananias and Sapphira—they fell dead and their bodies were buried.
5. (b) It was judicial—by this I mean, it was a just act of God upon both of these people because of their sin.
6. Now, here let me briefly answer the question, whether or not, Ananias and Sapphira were actual Christians.
7. Well, I can answer that question very simply—I don't know—what we do know is, they were professing Christians.
8. And so, if they were true Christians, God killed them as a loving chastisement or discipline for their sin.
9. This seems to be what's happened in Corinth, in 1Cor.11:30, when many of them were weak, sick, and "many sleep."
10. That term "sleep" is used by Paul elsewhere to refer to the death of Christians who "sleep in the Lord."
11. But as we consider the circumstances of Acts 5, I suggest to you that's it more likely they were hypocrites.
12. It's for this reason, I've described this judgment as "judicial"—that is, it's not "remedial" but "judicial."
13. Now, let me just clarify, there's really no way to be absolutely 100% certain they were both hypocrites.
14. But the reason I suggest this is likely is because of how Peter describes Satan's activity within them—"why has Satan filled your heart."
15. This sounds very similar to what was said of Judas, Jn.13:27—"Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, 'What you do, do quickly.'"
16. The imagery, both with respect to Ananias and Judas, suggests that that Satan had control of them both.
17. But either way, we know with certainty that Judas, while being a professing Christian, was a hypocrite (and this seems to be also true with regards to Ananias and Sapphira).
18. (2) Its result, v5b—"So great fear came upon all those who heard these things" v11—"So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things."
19. I think the point is—great fear came upon those who within the church (Christians), and those outside the church (non-Christians).
20. Now, it's important to keep in mind, while great fear came upon both groups, both groups were very different.

21. The church was made up of people who loved God and were His children, whereas, those outside of the church were not.
22. But Luke tells us, great fear fell upon both groups—both groups were given a sense of God's character.
23. (a) The fear of the wicked—while the wicked do not fear God properly, God often restrains them with a sense of fear.
24. Acts 5:13—"Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly"—while they respected the disciples, they refused to join them.
25. Why? Because they saw what happens to hypocrites! And it was in this way, God kept His church pure.
26. It was through this sense of awe, that God restrained hypocrites from joining and polluting His beloved people.
27. (b) The fear of the righteous—the fear that came upon the church was intended to purify their hearts.
28. Before I go further, let me simply point out in passing, that here we actually find the word "church" for the first time in the book of Acts.
29. If you remember, the Greek word Ecclesia is compound of two words means "to call out" and "gather."
30. The church is God's called out ones who've been gathered together—they are His holy and beloved people.
31. And I suggest, the Holy Spirit chose this word at this point for a very good reason—"So great fear came upon all the church."
32. God used the killing of Ananias and Sapphira as a means to instill a holy fear within the hearts of His people.
33. It's true, that the Lord no longer (usually) strikes down hypocrites in the presence of the entire church.
34. Remember as I've said many times—this was the age of the apostles—Peter received direct revelation concerning this matter (he knew what they did because God, who knows all things, revealed it to him).
35. But this doesn't deny that the principle remains—one primary purpose of church discipline is to instill fear in the hearts of God's people.
36. 1Tim.5:20—"Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear"—by "sinning" he means, sinning without repentance.
37. Those who've been privately warned, if they continue in their sin, should be rebuked publically "in the presence of all."
38. That is, in the presence of the entire church. Why? "That the rest also may fear"—that is, fear God and fear sinning.
39. God publically struck down Ananias and Sapphira, for the purpose of instilling fear in the hearts of His people.
40. That is, that they would behold Him in all His sovereign and holy glory, and would see the consequences of sin.
41. I don't know, maybe there was another person in the church who was being tempted to deceive the apostles.
42. Let just for the sake of illustration, there was a man who had just sold his land and was about to lie about it, or maybe he hadn't yet sold it but was being tempted to lie. How would have this event affected him? It would have no doubt had a very sober and positive impact upon him.
43. Brethren, it's never wrong to not sin, because you see the consequences of sin around you—that's a good thing (and thus, the judgment of God that fell upon these two members, was an act of love by God for His people).