As we await the day when our heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, will return to deliver us fully from this present age, we must be set apart from the world. When the Scriptures say "world," they generally refer to the world system-the political and social order that rejects God, is ruled by Satan, and governs the minds and manners of people who have not been saved (2nd Corinthians 4:3-4, 1st John 5:19). Through Jesus' death and resurrection. God secured the ultimate victory over the devil. Satan may rule this world, but his reign is fast approaching its end. Our deliverance-and God's glory-shall endure for all ages. With this in mind, we are to share God's light and love with the world-not to be confused with falling in love with the world or seeking to receive its love. Focusing on our heavenly home, we must clothe ourselves with humility. We must put off all self-seeking efforts and motives. These only fuel our pride, a dangerous attitude that blinds us to Satan's deception and makes us vulnerable. And we must cling to the cross, the same instrument that deals Satan's death sentence and secures our salvation through Christ's victory.

Derek Prince

Prayer Study # 503

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

First Love Ministries, Inc, of Perry, Georgia USA

Acts 4:32Amplified Bible (AMP)

Sharing among Believers

32 *Now the company of believers was of one heart and soul, and not one [of them] claimed that anything belonging to him was [exclusively] his own, but everything was common property and for the use of all.*

Acts 5:1-16Amplified Bible (AMP)

Fate of Ananias and Sapphira

5 *Now a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,* ***2*** *and with*

his wife's full knowledge [and complicity] he kept back some of the proceeds, bringing only a portion of it, and set it at the apostles' feet. [Ananias wanted everyone to think that he had turned over all the money from the sale, so secretly holding some back was essentially embezzling. If he had been honest and told Peter that he had kept some of the money, he would have done nothing wrong.]***3*** *But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and [secretly] keep back for yourself some of the proceeds [from the sale] of the land?* ***4*** *As long as it remained [unsold], did it not remain your own [to do with as you pleased]? And after it was sold, was the money not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this act [of hypocrisy and deceit] in your heart? You have not [simply] lied to people, but to God."* ***5*** *And hearing these words, Ananias fell down suddenly and died; and great fear and awe gripped those who heard of it.* ***6*** *And the young men [in the congregation] got up and wrapped up the body, and carried it out and buried it.* ***7*** *Now after an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.* ***8*** *Peter asked her, "Tell me whether you sold your land for so much?" And she said, "Yes, for so much."* ***9*** *Then Peter said to her, "How could you two have agreed together to put the Spirit*

*of the Lord to the test? Look! The feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.” **10** And at once she fell down at his feet and died; and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. **11** And great fear and awe gripped the whole church, and all who heard about these things. **12** At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders (attesting miracles) were continually taking place among the people. And by common consent they all met together [at the temple] in [the covered porch called] Solomon’s portico. **13** But none of the rest [of the people, the non-believers] dared to associate with them; however, the people were holding them in high esteem and were speaking highly of them. **14** More and more believers in the Lord, crowds of men and women, were constantly being added to their number, **15** to such an extent that they even carried their sick out into the streets and put them on cots and sleeping pads, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on one of them [with healing power]. **16** And the people from the towns in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing the sick and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.*

The Church was on fire and growing rapidly. During His ministry on earth, Jesus repeatedly urged His followers not to be entangled with the pursuit of material possessions. He knew that many of His followers in the early Church would lose all they had due to persecution or to the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 AD. In addition, the First Century Church wanted to follow the example of Jesus who taught the importance of caring for those in need. In the minds and hearts of these people, everything they owned belonged to the Lord. The number of believers probably totaled 5000 or more. These Christians, for the most part, were knit together in Christ's love. They had deep feelings for each other, and they did things to reflect the love they shared.

One man came up with the idea of selling his property and taking the money and laying the money at the apostle's feet. The man's last name was Joseph, but he is known as Barnabas, which means "Son of Encouragement." He was a Levite of Cyprus and later accompanied Paul on one of his missionary journeys. His act of generosity, not done for public praise, deeply touched the people and inspired others to surrender their own possessions.

The result of this unselfish, giving spirit was great power and blessing on the entire Church (Acts 4:33). The people truly lived out John 13:35: ***"By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another."***

Seeing how Joseph was honored led a couple in the Church, Ananias and Sapphira, hoping to also receive the praise of men, to sell some of their own land and to give it to the Church. They were not, in any way, coerced to do this. Wanting to look good before people but not wanting to give up all of their wealth, however, Ananias and Sapphira decided to give just a portion of the money. They were unwilling to trust the Lord to faithfully meet their needs, and they secretly held back part of the money but lied to Peter and told him that they had given it all.

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was lying. They were dishonest, deceitful and hypocritical. They thought they could fool the people and God with the appearance of sacrifice. Peter quickly discerned the truth and said, "You have not lied to men, but to God." Peter did not, as many suppose, call down judgment from heaven. He merely exposed Ananias and Sapphira's lie. It was God who struck them down.

J.D. Greear, author of *Gaining by Losing,* gives us 5 things God teaches us from the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira:

1. In the Church, there are two kinds of people, and it's nearly impossible to distinguish them from the outside appearance.
2. We cannot hide from God. The Holy Spirit knows our thought as if they were being displayed on a screen. A day will come when every secret will be proclaimed from the housetops (Matthew 10:27).
3. The closer we are to grace, the greater the offense of sin. First, their deaths served as a sign. God

doesn't do this with everyone who lies to the Holy Spirit today. But that should not cover up the fact that this death is a picture of how God feels about it. Secondly, Ananias and Sapphira had seen the activity of the Holy Spirit so closely that the seriousness of the sin increased. Think of it like the temple: the closer you get to the holy place, the more significant is every blemish.

4. Fear is part of worship. Unsurprisingly these dramatic deaths caused a great deal of fear (Acts 5:5, 11). But we may be shocked that even in the light of this, "*more and more people believed in the Lord*" (Acts 5:14). As the fear of God increases so does the sense of His love, because we understand more fully what we have been saved from. My favorite definition of the fear of God is *awe mixed with intimacy.*

5. Sin is a deadly serious matter to God. But, as R.C. Sproul says, we forget that God's patience is designed to lead us to repentance, *not* to become bolder in our sin. If Jesus really went through the tormenting hell of the cross to redeem us, and we neglect that in pursuit of our sin, what will it be like to stand before God? *"How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"* Hebrews 2:3)

So we can summarize the lessons of this passage. First, God will judge those who try to hurt His Church. "*If anyone destroys God's temple* [which refers to us, His people], God will destroy him. Secondly, God needed to protect the purity and power and witness of the early Church. If He had not dealt with Ananias and Sapphira in

the severe manner he did, it would have allowed far more dishonesty and hypocrisy, which may have destroyed the emerging Church. Thirdly, the Christians learned that lying is very serious to God, and thus they should always tell the truth.

Someone spoke about this passage of scripture, "Unfortunately, the years have diluted the purity of the Church, and as far removed as we are from the uniqueness of the Apostolic Age, we may even find it difficult to recognize our hypocrisy. We understand hypocrisy to be a deliberate and calculated effort to deceive, as it was with Ananias and Sapphira, and we may not be consciously doing that. We may simply have fallen into the unconscious habit of protecting our saintly image, covering our carnality, keeping people from know what is going on in our hearts and in our homes. That is usually easier than committing ourselves totally to Christ and letting Him live through us to make the changes He wants to make. This form of hypocrisy has become a way of life in the Church of Jesus Christ today, and may be the reason we are not making any greater impact on our godless society. Finally, we have to answer the question, 'Do we want to have an appearance of spirituality or do we genuinely want to be what God wants us to be?"

FINAL THOUGHTS

The theologian John Stott writes that Ananias and Sapphira were not so much misers, as they were thieves. "They wanted the credit and the prestige for sacrificial generosity without the convenience of it. So, in order to gain a

reputation to which they had no right, they told a brazen lie. Their motive in giving was not to relieve the poor but to fatten their own ego."

"I Want To Be Just Like You"
Phillips, Craig and Dean

He climbs in my lap for a goodnight hug
He calls me Dad and I call him Bub
With his faded old pillow and a bear named Pooh
He snuggles up close and says "I want to be like you"
I tuck him in bed and I kiss him goodnight
Trippin' over the toys as I turn out the light
And I whisper a prayer that someday he'll see
He's got a father in God 'cause he's seen Jesus in me

Lord, I want to be just like You
'Cause he wants to be just like me
I want to be a holy example
For his innocent eyes to see
Help me be a living Bible, Lord
That my little boy can read
I want to be just like You
'Cause he wants to be like me

Got to admit I've got so far to go
Make so many mistakes and I'm sure that You know
Sometimes it seems no matter how hard I try
With all the pressures in life I just can't get it all right
But I'm trying so hard to learn from the best
Being patient and kind, filled with Your tenderness
'Cause I know that he'll learn from the things that he sees

And the Jesus he finds will be the Jesus in me
Right now from where he stands I may seem mighty tall
But it's only 'cause I'm learning from the best Father of them all