



Sermon Text: Acts 4:32-5:11

Sermon Date: October 8, 2017

There are several scriptural passages that don't sit right with us. Like a pill that gets caught in our throat, they make us uncomfortable. "How could God be so harsh?" we ask. Our text on Sunday is one of those passages. Ananias and Sapphira deceive the church and they are struck dead instantly. No warning. No probation period. No call for repentance. We focused on four aspects of the text.

THE DANGER OF HYPOCRISY

Our passage opens with a beautiful summary of a Spirit-filled church. There is powerful preaching, intimate fellowship, radical generosity and compassionate care. A man named Barnabas is held up as an example of the church's sacrificial love. The danger of hypocrisy is that it is always a threat—even in a healthy church. We are never beyond the reach of this tempting sin.

THE NATURE OF HYPOCRISY

Hypocrisy is a term that is often misunderstood. It is not simply acting against your stated principles (we will never be able to live up to the standard of Scripture). Instead, it is acting against your stated principles yet pretending not to do so. It includes intentional deception. In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira pretended to give all the proceeds to the church, even though they didn't. John Stott says, "They wanted the credit and the prestige for sacrificial generosity, without the inconvenience of it." We too often feel the pull to pretend to be who we know we are not.

THE OFFENSE OF HYPOCRISY

Why is hypocrisy so offensive to God? Hypocrisy often **ignores God** completely. Ananias and Sapphira act like the Holy Spirit isn't even present in the church. They think they are merely lying to men, but Peter stresses that they are lying to God. Hypocrisy also **diminishes God**. How absurd it is to think we can deceive the God who hears all our thoughts and knows our every deed? Hypocrisy doesn't take God seriously; it creates a dim-witted caricature of Him. Hypocrisy also **presumes upon God**. In our hypocrisy, we often act like God's grace has neutered His holiness—and therefore, our sin is safe.

THE PUNISHMENT FOR HYPOCRISY

Lastly, we see Ananias and Sapphira killed instantly for their sin. In our sin we forfeit the right to the gift of life, and it is only God's continual mercy that keeps our hearts beating. While this seems excessive, it shocks us because we are prone to take mercy for granted. As R.C. Sproul said, "We have come to expect God to be merciful. From there the next step is easy: We demand it. When it is not forthcoming, our first response is anger against God, coupled with protest: 'It isn't fair.'"

TWO TAKE-AWAYS

1. **Fear!** This text is meant to make us fearful of God's holiness and power. It should cause us to fear the many sins we treat so lightly. John Piper says, "This is the lesson Luke wants us to get: faking faith in the presence of God is a fearful thing."
2. **Fear Not!** Yet, fear often inspires hypocrisy (just fear in the wrong direction). We must look to the Cross. The God who knows everything about you died to secure your forgiveness. We don't make God small, but instead rejoice that His grace is strong. Instead of hiding and pretending, we are inspired to live authentic lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. Why are we so easily tempted to pretend and deceive?
3. Do you properly fear God's holiness and power? How does the Cross make us confident in God's love without making God small or sin safe?