

Who Do You Think You Are Fooling?

Acts 5:1-11

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The story of Ananias and Saphira is a very disturbing one. It is recognized in the Scriptures as such with the concluding statement: *Great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.* One Bible commentator said that it is “one of the most unnerving episodes in the whole of the New Testament” (James Dunn). This the only “death penalty” moment in the church; nothing like it would ever happen again. It is not just uniqueness that causes us to pause on it, but the ferocious response to sin. What is remarkable is that others had sinned in similar ways before and afterwards; consider how Peter had lied not many months before. This was an important moment in the church.

One interesting aspect is that it parallels an event in the Old Testament. We know that Israel is a foreshadow of the church, so we can consider the conquest of Canaan as a parallel to the first parts of Acts, as the church begins its conquest of the world. The first conquest was Jericho, and God had said in Joshua 6:18 “*But as for you, only keep yourselves from the things under the ban, so that you do not covet them and take some of the things under the ban, and make the camp of Israel accursed and bring trouble on it.*” We find in Joshua 7 that one man, Achan, did not obey the command, kept some of the loot, and hid it under his tent. When Israel went again to fight, they lost, and God told them it was because of this sin.

Like Achan, Ananias and Saphira tried to hide their sins. But like Achan, their sins found them out. The lesson here is very important: when we sin, we are tempted to hide our sins. But we need to understand who we are really fooling. Not God, not our brethren, but only ourselves.

First of all, when we try to hide our sins, we are most certainly not fooling God. When Adam and Even sinned, they tried to cover their sins, and they were instantly seen by God. David said that God reveals all secret sin by the light of His presence (Psalm 90:8). God knows when we are “faking” discipleship; He knows when we are just going through the visible motions, but our heart does not match our works. He knows when we are just doing works to be seen by men. “*Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you*” (Matthew 6:4b). What we do not appreciate is that God wants sin exposed. He wants this for two reasons: first, so others fear sinning (as seen here), but second, so forgiveness is sought out. So you can “*be sure your sin will find you out*” (Numbers 32:23).

Second, while we may on occasion fool our brethren, it never lasts long if at all. Brethren can soon discern a true disciple with the tools Jesus gave us. He said that true disciples are seen by their fruits in Matthew 7:16-20. He also said that sin becomes evident (1 Timothy 5:24). There are many instances where someone is sinning and they think they are fooling their brethren. However, it is not that they are fooling their brethren, but they are merely pushing their patience.

But the real danger is that there is one person whom you can constantly fool: Yourself. We always deceive ourselves with sin. This is because the heart easily deceives (Jeremiah 17:9). Paul said that it is the nature of sin that sin easily deceives (Romans 7:11). It leads us to think that we are okay (1 Corinthians 6:9) or that we have fooled others (Galatians 6:7). All of this is truly the deception only on ourselves.

Ananias and Saphira was an important lesson to the church. Early disciples learned that sin has deadly consequences. They learned that sin is not hidden from God. They learned that when we sin, it is always against God, and that the act of hiding sin is against the Holy Spirit.