

Struck Dead before the Church

Enthusiasm in the church is a wonderful thing, but it carries a hidden danger: the danger of irreverence before God. Acts 4 concludes with great enthusiasm, as the believers experienced great power, great grace and great excitement about God's work in the world (Acts 4:32-37). Because of two people who lied, the church quickly experienced, "great fear" as well (Acts 5:5, 11).

Ananias ("God is gracious") and his wife Sapphira ("Beautiful") were no doubt swept up in the wave of enthusiasm and sacrificial generosity at Jerusalem. They wanted to have a part in giving generously like their brethren, but they hesitated to give *everything* as other Christians were doing (Acts 4:32; 5:1-2). Together, Ananias and Sapphira concocted a plan where they would pretend that they had given everything to the Lord. In their enthusiasm to be seen as generous, these two believers lied to God, the apostles and their brethren. Notice several lessons that may be learned from what ensued.

God cannot be duped – Peter accused Ananias of attempting to, "Lie to the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:3) and, "To God" (Acts 5:4). At stake was nothing less than the credibility of God and the apostles. If brethren got the idea that God could somehow be fooled, imagine what would happen to their confidence that God was leading them in the right direction as they listened to the apostles' doctrine (cf. Acts 2:42). They were putting God's Spirit to the test in front of the whole church (Acts 5:9). The judgment God meted out upon Ananias and Sapphira convinces brethren everywhere that there is no sin that escapes His sight. Paul later wrote, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7). Enthusiasm about God's work is wonderful, but God still expects men to respect His law (James 1:25).

Satan is interested in what is happening with the church – Peter told Ananias that he had been a willing accomplice of the devil himself: "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie..." (Acts 5:3). The devil will do anything he can to get into the church, because the church represents God's victory over Satan and sin (cf. Acts 20:28; Heb. 2:14-15). Christians constantly wrestle against Satanic forces (Eph. 6:10-12). Any time a Christian willingly gives in to temptation, he becomes an accomplice of the devil and works against the purpose and mission of God Himself (cf. Matt. 16:22-23).

Christians are not to do evil that good may come – In the episode with Ananias and Sapphira, notice that very little attention is given to the money itself. Situation ethics might reason thusly: "Consider how much good might be accomplished through the money that Ananias and Sapphira DID give." Money is a temporary stewardship (cf. 1 Tim. 6:17-19), but God has a long history of accomplishing His will regardless of whether there are big financial donors available (cf. 1 Kings 17:1-16; John 6:1-11). Samuel once rebuked Saul, who had ignored God's command and brought spoils to sacrifice: "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22). No matter how enthusiastic

and excited the church may be, it is NEVER right to disobey God's word, no matter how much apparent good might result.

Ananias and Sapphira's deaths remind us that God takes what happens in His church very seriously. May it ever be the case that sincere, zealous brethren serve Him in obedient reverence.

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