

Cleaning House

(Acts 5:1-11)

Introduction

1. Accelerate: Jesus accelerates us by the power of the Holy Spirit to a transformative, relational, missional life in Christ.
2. As the Holy Spirit accelerates His Church for the gospel, there is one thing that can kill that momentum.
3. Background:
 - a. A Jesus-centered family of Christ is united by the Holy Spirit in powerful mission & care for one another.
 - b. [Acts 4:36-37] An example in Barnabas, who gives what little he has to help those who have even less.

Hypocrisy poses as holy, for the praise of men [Acts 5:1-6]

1. [1] Like Barnabas, Ananias & Sapphira own a field.
 - a. They have an opportunity to give sacrificially to the glory of God & the good of other Christians in need.
 - b. They saw the way people responded positively to Barnabas' sacrificial giving.
 - c. They crave the same adulation.
2. [2] Ananias withhold some of the proceeds.
 - a. Like Barnabas, he lays money at the apostles' feet, a gesture of submitting to spiritual authority/discernment.
 - b. But Ananias conspires with his wife, & "kept some back."
 - i. Not as a mistake or to give later; verb tense means to "intentionally keep for yourself."
 - ii. Same word used when Achan disobeys God's command & kept back spoils of Jericho (cf. Josh 7:1).
 - iii. Hebrew culture: Tied to the idea of financial fraud (extra-biblical reference: 2 Macc 4:32).
 - c. Ananias intentionally insinuates that he's giving all of the proceeds to God/the needy (like Barnabas).
3. [3-4b] Ananias' hypocrisy is revealed.
 - a. [3] By the power of the Spirit, Peter discerns & confronts Ananias' deception.
 - i. Peter declares his heart is filled with Satan (vs. filled with the Holy Spirit).
 - ii. Ananias attempted to deceive the Holy Spirit.
 - b. [4a] Giving to the needy is completely voluntary
 - i. Before & after selling the field, he could've done what he wants with the money.
 - c. [4b] A premeditated scheme to earn the applause of men, brownie points with God, & keep some cash.
 - i. The issue is hypocrisy: Literally, an actor on a stage, wearing a mask, playing a role.
 - ii. It's not falling short through sin (we all do), but attempting to pretend/appear more spiritual.
 - d. **Hypocrisy poses as holy, for the praise of men, to the glory of self.**
 - i. It is played out through image management
 - ii. Motive: To receive all the benefit/praise without any of the sacrifice.
4. [4c] Ananias lied to God the Holy Spirit (not just to men).
 - a. After all he's seen & heard of the Spirit's work/power (cf. Acts 1-4), he still tries to deceive God.
 - b. "I'm the actor; God is the audience (not men). I pose, giving everything I am/have to God, but it's only an act."
 - c. **Sin: Lying to God is a challenge to His character.**
 - i. Proudful challenge God: "You're not really God. I can fool You, & get away with it."
 - ii. Challenging His omniscience: "Do You really know everything? Every thought/intention (Psa 139:2)?"
 - iii. Challenging His holiness: "Is Your/our holiness that important? Will You really do anything about it?"
5. [5-6] The result of challenging God's character.
 - a. [5a] God's judgment is immediate; Ananias is struck dead.
 - i. [5b] The people respond in great fear of God (cf. v.11).

- ii. [6] The young men quickly & quietly wrap him up & bury him (cf. v.10).
 - b. Isn't God loving, gracious, merciful, forgiving? Yes, and He's also holy, righteous, & the just Judge.
 - c. This is how seriously God takes His character & our holiness in the family of Christ.
6. Application: How is your faith simply image management right now?
- a. When it comes to going to church, worshiping, giving, serving God, friendships/fellowship with His family, etc.
 - b. Being authentic doesn't mean not engaging in these activities (an excuse)
 - i. Don't just be authentic about your sinfulness/failures, be authentic in following Jesus.
 - c. How are you living for the praise of others & glory of self?
 - i. Are you engaging in religious appearance without relational substance with Jesus?

Fear sees God's holiness, leading to praise of God [Acts 5:7-11]

1. [7-8] Sapphira is given a second chance.
 - a. [7] She is unaware that they've been caught.
 - b. [8a] Peter gives her the opportunity to repent in front of the apostles.
 - i. Ananias was immediately struck dead because he already rejected the authority of God.
 - ii. By God's grace, there's hope for Sapphira to repent.
 - iii. Authentic Christians respond to their sin: "I blew it. I'm sorry. I want to repent/change." They own it.
 - c. [8b] Tragically, she continues their lie to God.
2. [9-10] Sapphira tests God the Holy Spirit
 - a. [9a] She is equally complicit & responsible as her husband.
 - i. It is the same sin of hypocrisy/lying to the Spirit, with an added nuance.
 - b. "Test God's Spirit": Negative connotation; to tempt or put someone on trial to prove themselves before others.
 - i. They are guilty of luring/forcing God to prove Himself in front of everyone (to catch them if He can).
 - ii. We are commanded not to test God (cf. Deut 6:16; Luke 4:12), making him prove Himself to us.
 - iii. Sin: Testing God is a challenge to His authority & power.
 - c. [9b] Result: The young men who just buried her husband are back for her.
 - d. [10] God's judgment is immediate, Sapphira is struck dead.
3. [11] The response/solution to hypocrisy: The whole church experiences "great fear" (cf. v.5).
 - a. Fear: Healthy respect, reverence, awe; to take God seriously; to tremble & quake before His might; an acute awareness of His presence/power to act in judgment, and our accountability to Him.
 - b. Fear sees God's holiness, leading to a response of praise to God.
 - i. Such praise in awe & intimacy is what we describe as worship.
 - c. [Prov 29:25] The fear of man is a trap/snare, but [Prov 1:7] fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
 - i. You're going to fear/worship/bow before one or the other, men or God.
 - d. Fear is a strong word, uncomfortable for us, because our God is loving & approachable.
 - i. We experience reverential awe of something/someone powerful from a distance.
 - ii. But if you were to get into the ring & go up against that power (i.e., test), you would experience fear.
4. Praise of men or God?
 - a. If we live for the praise of men & glory of self, we're trapped forever trying to project the right image & manufacture value & worth from others' praise.
 - b. If we live for the praise of God, we're aware of His greatness, holiness, power, putting things in perspective.
 - i. The praise of men, glory for self is insignificant & rubbish.
 - ii. God alone is worthy of worship, fear & glory.
 - c. Application: Do you live for the praise of men or God?
 - i. Do you see God for who He is, & what He can do?
 - ii. Who receives praise, fear, worship in your life? Do you need to rethink where it's directed?

Conclusion

1. Why does Jesus take hypocrisy so seriously as the gospel spreads, the Spirit moves & the Church grows?
 - a. Hypocrisy will kill the authenticity of the message & the credibility of the messengers.
 - b. To the people in your sphere of influence, you may be the only pastor they will ever have, the only Bible they will ever read, the only gospel they will ever experience.
2. Cleaning house

- a. When we clean our house, it's not simply for appearance, organization, to find things.
- b. Most importantly, it's to cleanse germs that can infect & destroy us.
- c. Hypocrisy is the toxic mold that can infect & destroy every church.
- d. There are times God has to clean His house/family to protect us from infectious self-destruction (1 Pet 4:17).

3. Application: Let us repent of our hypocrisy.

- a. All the ways we pretend & lie before God/men, for the praise of men & glory of self.
- b. Ask God to help you really see Him, fear & worship Him, to the praise & glory of Jesus.