



Integrity Matters

Kicking It Off

Have you ever been caught in a small lie or exaggeration that spiraled into something bigger than you expected? What happened?

Read

Acts 5:1-16

Summary

A pedestal's whole job is to hold something up so people can see it. That's what the church is supposed to be: a stand that lifts up Jesus so the world can see him. The problem is when the stand starts thinking it's the display. When we get so focused on how we look, how people see us, how impressive we are, we stop doing the one thing we were made to do.

That's essentially what happened with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Barnabas sold some land and gave all the money to the church, not because anyone told him to, but because God put it on his heart. Ananias and Sapphira saw that and wanted the same credit. So they sold their land too, but they secretly kept some of the money and pretended they gave everything. And Peter called them out, not for giving too little, but for lying about it. They were performing generosity instead of actually being generous.

God is not interested in a percentage. He's not running the numbers on your giving. He wants your whole heart. He won't compete with your ego or your bank account for that spot. And that's uncomfortable, because it means you can't just check a box and move on. It's an ongoing conversation about surrender.

What's wild is that after all this, the early church actually grew. People on the outside were fearful, but they also respected them, because these people actually lived what they believed. Their words and their actions matched. And that's rare enough to be magnetic.

It's not about looking like a good Christian. It's about actually being honest with God, because he already sees everything anyway. Authenticity beats appearance every time.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. Ananias and Sapphira were not required to give anything, yet they felt pressure to perform generosity they did not genuinely feel. When have you done something for God out of obligation or comparison rather than a genuine response to his leading?
3. Scripture says the early church was both feared and respected by outsiders because their actions matched their words. What would it look like for your everyday life to earn that kind of respect from people who do not share your faith?
4. Pursuing holiness can easily turn into an exhausting focus on our own failures rather than a focus on the character of God. How do you personally distinguish between unhealthy self-fixation and genuine growth in your walk with God?
5. God desires an ongoing conversation about surrender rather than a one-time checklist of obedience. What is one area of your life where you sense God asking for more of your heart than you have been willing to give?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"God is not here to compete for your 10%. He's here for 100% of you. And the reason why this makes it more complicated is because when you give, there is a conversation that needs to happen. You need to be talking to the Lord and saying, 'Lord, how much am I supposed to give?'"

"The early church had no teachings that centered around themselves; all of their teaching centered around Christ. Here's the thing about being a pedestal: it is very important to lift up the name of Jesus. And it's very important that the pedestal has a firm foundation. A pedestal that is broken, that is wobbly, that doesn't do its function, is no longer a pedestal."

"When we pursue holiness, we aren't pursuing perfection in the pedestal. We're pursuing the holiness of God. The focus of the early church was not about you becoming more holy based on you. The whole idea was that you would pursue holiness in the name of Jesus."

"Your relationship with Christ is more important than your relationship with yourself. Authentic relationship with God is to say, 'God, I will pursue you even when I'm poor. I will pursue you even when I'm rich. I will pursue you when I'm sick. I will pursue you when I'm healthy. I will pursue you wholeheartedly.'"

Sermon Notes*Acts 5:1-16*

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2 and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? 4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." 5 When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. 6 The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." 9 But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

12 Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. 13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. 14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. 16 The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Outline

● THE POISON OF PRIDE (v1-4)

- Barnabas (ch. 4) sold land and gave freely, led by the Spirit, not by obligation. Giving was never a requirement for membership in the community.
- Ananias and Sapphira wanted Barnabas's reputation without Barnabas's heart. They kept back proceeds while presenting their gift as the full amount.
- Peter's key point: the land was theirs, the money was at their disposal. The sin was not in the amount but in the deception.
- "Satan filled your heart" contrasts with the Spirit-filled community. Your heart can have only one king; God will not compete for it.
- Echoes Achan in Joshua 7: hidden sin threatening to poison the foundation of God's work at its beginning.
- Pride is the poison; submission to the Lord is the cure. This is not condemnation but the setup for the gospel.

● THE GRAVITY OF INTEGRITY (v5-11)

- Ananias and Sapphira both fall dead; great fear comes upon the church and all who hear.
- Peter's logic: "You have not lied to man but to God." The offense was testing the Holy Spirit, not disrespecting church leadership.
- God treats sin with gravity because this deception could have ruined the early church's foundations.
- Integrity defined: doing the right thing when no one is watching, because God is watching.
- Giving is not about percentages or formulas. God is not after your 10%; he is after 100% of you. Generosity flows from an ongoing conversation with God, not from obligation or loopholes.
- When God places giving on your heart, you give. Full stop. Giving teaches us submission.

● THE POWER OF AUTHENTICITY (v12-16)

- v13 paradox: "None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem." Outsiders were afraid and respectful simultaneously.
- The church was respected not for organizational power but because their lives matched their message. They practiced what they preached.
- v14: Despite fear, multitudes were added. The church grows not by being palatable but by being genuine.
- v15-16: Signs, wonders, and healings followed. These miracles were evidence of God's power through an authentic community.

- We do not chase miracles; we chase the one who does miracles. Authentic faith pursues God in every circumstance.
- The church should be a community that the world may not want to join but cannot help but respect, because the Lord's work, not ours, is on display.

Notes

There is a simple image that captures the calling of the church: a pedestal. Not the kind you admire for its own beauty, but the kind that exists for one purpose only, to lift something up so the world can see it. The early church understood this. Their role was not to draw attention to themselves but to elevate the name of Jesus, to hold up the gospel so that the world could witness the glory of God rather than the glory of his people.

The problem, of course, is that pedestals can become statues. When a community that was meant to point upward starts turning inward, when it becomes preoccupied with how it looks, how it is perceived, how impressive it appears, it ceases to function as a pedestal at all. It becomes an ornate monument to itself. This is not merely a modern problem amplified by social media, though social media certainly accelerates the tendency. It is a human problem, as old as the church itself. The early church had no teachings that centered around themselves. All of their teaching centered around Christ. That distinction matters more than we often realize.

This brings us to a passage in Acts chapter 5 that many people remember as a cautionary tale about giving. The story of Ananias and Sapphira is often reduced to a warning: give with the right heart, or God might strike you down. But the passage is doing something far more significant than issuing a threat about financial generosity. It is establishing a foundational principle for the life of the church: authenticity is more important than appearance.

To understand what went wrong with Ananias and Sapphira, you have to understand the context. In Acts chapter 4, a man named Barnabas sold a piece of land and laid the full proceeds at the apostles' feet. He did this not because he was required to, not because the church demanded it as a condition of membership, but because the Holy Spirit moved his heart to do so. The early church was not practicing enforced communism. Peter makes this explicit when he confronts Ananias: the land was yours. Even after you sold it, the money was at your disposal. There was no obligation, no mandate, no entry fee.

Barnabas gave freely, led by the Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira saw this and wanted the same recognition. They sold their land too, but they kept back a portion of the proceeds while presenting their gift as if it were the full amount. The issue was not the amount they gave. Peter does not rebuke them for insufficient generosity. The issue was

deception. They wanted to appear as generous as Barnabas without actually being as generous as Barnabas. They wanted the reputation without the reality.

This is the poison of pride at work. Pride turns everything into a performance. It makes life about perception, about being well regarded, well liked, well respected. When pride fills a person's heart, there is no room left for the Spirit. Peter's diagnosis is stark: Satan has filled your heart. The contrast with the rest of the community, repeatedly described as being filled with the Holy Spirit, could not be sharper. Your heart can have only one king. It cannot serve two masters. This is the same principle Jesus taught: you cannot love God and love money. It is not that God demands a specific percentage. It is that God desires the whole heart, and a heart divided between devotion to God and devotion to self is not truly devoted to God at all.

The story echoes an Old Testament parallel. In Joshua chapter 7, a man named Achan set aside for himself plunder that belonged to the Lord during the conquest of Ai. Just as Achan's hidden sin threatened to derail Israel's entrance into the promised land, Ananias and Sapphira's deception threatened to poison the foundations of the early church. God was not being harsh for the sake of being harsh. He was protecting the integrity of something that had to remain pure if it was going to accomplish its purpose.

When Ananias heard Peter's words, he fell down and died. Three hours later, Sapphira arrived, unaware of what had happened. Peter gave her the opportunity to tell the truth, asking whether the land had sold for the amount they claimed. She confirmed the lie, and she too fell dead. The text tells us that great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

It is natural to read this and feel that God's response was disproportionate. But the passage is not inviting us to put God on trial for being unkind. It is inviting us to recalibrate our understanding of how seriously God takes sin, particularly the sin of deception within his community. The lie was not directed at Peter. Peter makes this clear: you have not lied to man but to God. Ananias and Sapphira were not merely trying to fool the church leadership. They were attempting to deceive the Holy Spirit, testing the very God who dwelt among them.

Integrity, at its core, is doing the right thing even when no one is watching. For Christians, there is an additional dimension: doing the right thing because God is always watching. This reframes the entire conversation about generosity and obedience. It is not about what the church knows you are giving. It is not about audits or percentages or automated payments. It is about what happens in the privacy of your own heart when you know that only God can see.

The question of how much to give is not answered with a simple formula. It would almost be easier if it were, if Peter had simply told Ananias he owed ten percent and he

had fallen short. But the standard is not a percentage. The standard is a heart fully surrendered to God's leading. When God places something on your heart, you respond with obedience, not with negotiation, not with attempts to find the minimum acceptable threshold. This is uncomfortable because it requires an ongoing, honest conversation with God rather than a checklist.

What follows the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 is remarkable. Verse 13 presents what seems like a paradox: "None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem." The outsiders were simultaneously afraid of the community and deeply respectful of it. They looked at these early Christians and thought they were radical, even strange, selling everything they had, living in radical generosity, worshiping a crucified and risen man. And yet they could not deny that these people practiced what they preached.

This is the power of authenticity. The early church was not respected because it was powerful as an organization. It was a grassroots movement, not a bureaucratic institution. It was respected because its members' lives matched their message. Ananias and Sapphira had to be dealt with precisely because their deception, if left unchecked, would have undermined the very thing that made the church compelling: its integrity.

And then comes the growth. Verse 14 tells us that more and more believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women. The logic seems backwards. People were afraid to join, and yet the church grew. This is how God works. The church does not grow by making itself palatable, by softening its message until no one is uncomfortable, by becoming so accommodating that there is nothing left to fear. It grows because the Holy Spirit draws people to a community where something real is happening, where God is genuinely at work, where the name of Jesus is lifted high on a pedestal of integrity rather than a statue of self promotion.

The passage goes on to describe signs and wonders, healings and deliverances, people carrying the sick into the streets hoping that even Peter's shadow might fall on them. These miracles were not the point. They were the evidence of God's power flowing through an authentic community. The church should never chase miracles. It should chase the one who performs them. An authentic relationship with God means pursuing him in poverty and in wealth, in sickness and in health, whether there are five people in the room or ten thousand. Authenticity does not fluctuate with circumstances.

This is the bottom line for any community that calls itself a church. The world may not want to join us, and that is acceptable if the reason is that we take sin seriously and worship a holy God. But the world should respect us, not because of our organizational power or cultural influence, but because what we do matches what we say. We are not here to build impressive statues of ourselves. We are here to be pedestals, nothing more

and nothing less, lifting up the only name that matters. And the stronger our integrity, the higher we can lift that name.

Blog

The early church was not a utopia. We sometimes imagine those first believers as spiritually pristine, floating from one prayer meeting to the next in perfect harmony. But Luke, the careful historian, won't let us hold that illusion for long. Just verses after describing a community so unified they held everything in common, he introduces us to Ananias and Sapphira. Their story is uncomfortable and it should be.

Acts 4, we meet Barnabas, a man so transformed by the Spirit that he sold a field and laid the entire proceeds at the apostles' feet. No fanfare, no conditions, no holding back. He became the ideal example for Spirit-filled generosity, and the community rightly honored him for it. Barnabas earned significant reputation through his radical sacrifice (although I'm sure that he didn't do it to increase his reputation).

Then another couple, another property sale, another gift laid at the apostles' feet. But something is different. Ananias and Sapphira sold their land and brought a portion to the apostles while claiming it was the whole amount. They wanted what Barnabas had received, the admiration and respect, without paying the same price. They wanted to look like Barnabas without living like Barnabas.

Peter makes clear that they were under no obligation to sell. "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?" he asks. "And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?" The early church practiced radical generosity, but it was voluntary generosity. No one was forced to give. No one was required to sell property. Ananias and Sapphira could have kept everything. They could have given half and said, "We're giving half." That would have been both generous and honest. Instead, they presented a partial gift as a total sacrifice. The sin was not keeping money. The sin was pretending they hadn't.

Luke uses a particular Greek word for what they did, a word that would have sent shivers down the spine of any Jewish reader familiar with their Scriptures. The term is "enosphisato," meaning to secretly keep back or misappropriate. It's the same word used in the Greek Old Testament for Achan's sin in Joshua 7. After the fall of Jericho, God commanded that all the plunder be devoted to him. Achan secretly kept some for himself, and his deception brought judgment on all Israel. Luke is drawing a deliberate parallel. Just as Achan's hidden sin threatened Israel at the beginning of the conquest, Ananias and Sapphira's hidden sin threatened the church at the beginning of its mission.

Peter's confrontation reveals the true nature of their offense. "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" The question is jarring. We don't often think of respectable church members as being filled by Satan. But Peter sees what we often miss: the heart is never neutral territory. It will be filled by something, by someone. A heart that isn't yielded to the Spirit becomes vulnerable to the enemy. And notice that Peter doesn't excuse Ananias by blaming Satan. "Why have you contrived this deed in your

heart?" he asks. Satan influenced, but Ananias chose. The filling was real, but so was the responsibility.

Then Peter makes a statement with enormous theological weight, "You have not lied to man but to God." Think about what that means. To lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God. The Spirit is not merely God's influence or energy. The Spirit is God himself, personally present in the community. When Ananias and Sapphira deceived the church, they were deceiving the One who dwells in the church. They treated the all-knowing God as if He could be managed, as if they could curate their image before the community while hiding the truth from the Almighty.

God's subsequent judgment was swift and severe. Ananias heard Peter's words and fell down dead. Three hours later, Sapphira arrived, not knowing what had happened. Peter gave her a chance to tell the truth. She didn't take it. She confirmed the lie, and she met the same fate as her husband. United in deception, they were united in judgment.

Why such extreme consequences? Don't we all sin? Isn't God merciful? Several realities help us understand what's happening here. First, this was a foundational moment for the church. When a bridge is being built, the supports must be perfect. A flaw at the foundation threatens everything built on it. God was protecting the church's foundation, ensuring that hypocrisy would not become normalized at the very start. Second, the sin was not merely against the community but against the Holy Spirit directly. They were testing whether God really knows, really sees, really cares. Third, and perhaps most importantly, God's judgment on Ananias and Sapphira was also God's protection of the church. He cared too much about his people to let pretense become acceptable.

The result was what Luke calls "great fear." Not mild concern, but profound reverent awe. This fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard.

We might expect that such severe judgment would drive people away. Who would want to join a community where God strikes down hypocrites? But the opposite happened. Luke tells us that "more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." The judgment didn't shrink the church. It accelerated its growth.

Why? Because authentic holiness is more attractive than comfortable compromise. People are not drawn to communities that tolerate everything. They are drawn to communities that stand for something, communities where truth matters, where the gap between public profession and private reality is taken seriously. The world has plenty of organizations where you can perform. The church was supposed to be different, a place where you could be real because the all-knowing God was already there.

Luke notes that "none of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem." There's a tension here that reveals something important. Outsiders hesitated to join casually, but they deeply respected the community. Holiness creates both attraction and appropriate distance. Like a blazing fire, it draws us with its warmth and light while warning us not to approach carelessly. The early church was not a club anyone could casually enter. It was a holy community where God himself dwelt.

What followed the purification was power. Signs and wonders multiplied through the apostles. The sick were brought into the streets on cots and mats, hoping even Peter's shadow might fall on them. People gathered from towns around Jerusalem, bringing the afflicted, and Luke tells us "they were all healed." Every one of them. The same Spirit who judged deception now flowed through the church in healing power. The purified church became the powerful church.

This is the pattern we see throughout Scripture. Integrity and power go together. A community purged of pretense becomes a channel for God's work. When the internal life of a group matches its external claims, it gains the moral authority necessary for genuine impact. The church that fears the Lord is the church that flourishes.

Today, we may not sell property and lie about the proceeds, but we have our own versions of the Ananias syndrome. We project spiritual maturity while harboring secret sin. We claim commitment while living compromise. We want the reputation of faithfulness without the cost of actual faithfulness. We perform for one another while hiding from God, as if that were possible. The story of Ananias and Sapphira is a warning, but it's also an invitation. God's judgment was severe because his love for the church is fierce. He will not allow his people to settle for pretense when transformation is available. He sees through our performance, not to condemn us, but to call us to something real. The gospel doesn't produce polished images. It produces genuine change.

Integrity matters. Not because we earn God's favor by being authentic, but because God is present in his church, and He cannot be fooled. The community that values truth over image, authenticity over appearance, becomes the community where his power flows freely.