



How might our lives change if we lived to please an **audience of ONE** rather than the parade of people we pass in life? Discover how living for an audience of ONE enables us to walk in purity, witness God's power, and worship through persecution.

Impurity among the Church

Acts 5:1-4 (NET)¹ Now a man named Ananias, together with Sapphira his wife, sold a piece of property. ² He kept back for himself part of the proceeds with his wife's knowledge; he brought only part of it and placed it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back for yourself part of the proceeds from the sale of the land? ⁴ Before it was sold, did it not belong to you? And when it was sold, was the money not at your disposal? How have you thought up this deed in your heart? **You have not lied to people but to God!**"

These people are Jewish and Jewish names usually mean something. After reading the entire story, I think you'll notice the irony of the names tied to this story.

- **Ananias** is the Greek form of Hebrew *Hananiah*, meaning "Yahweh has dealt graciously."¹
- **Sapphira** means "beautiful".²

This is quite an irony: Sapphira's actions are NOT beautiful and God isn't very gracious with Ananias, and for good reason. This couple didn't have to give anything. They could have given as little or as much as they decided - it was up to them.

They have **lied to the Holy Spirit**. It is impossible to be held accountable for lying to an impersonal force (e.g. electricity). This couple has lied to the third person of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit. They weren't interested in helping the team. They wanted the credit...ALL the credit - for part of the gift. It was a BIG FAT LIE - they **lied...to God!**

Lies destroy trust between friends & spouses; lies divide families & churches. And while some are skilled at lying to people - GOD SEES IT ALL!

And that's the part they overlooked. That's the part WE ALL OVERLOOK when we lie. The **boss or teacher** might not find out; the **spouse** may never know; the **parents** will likely stay in the dark; and friends? But GOD SEES IT ALL!

BIG TRUTH: Actions & Intentions are judged by an Audience of ONE.

As we've seen over the last few weeks, the first followers of Jesus who were experiencing the Presence & power of God. They were devoted to Jesus & each other. God was healing & saving through the gospel message. Believers were experiencing deep relationships as they shared their lives & their stuff with each other. What a wonderful time to live. And yet **there was a monster in their midst**, a **trojan horse** endangering the community of believers.

¹ Chad Brand et al., eds., "Ananias," Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 64.

² Craig S. Keener, Acts: An Exegetical Commentary & 2: Introduction and 1:1-14:28, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012-2013), 1185.

Lies had been smuggled into the middle of the Christian community, with the potential to destroy the foundation of trust among the followers of Jesus. There's another player that Peter recognizes: the presence of Satan influencing Ananias to lie. Satan is not a name, but a description meaning "the adversary" or "enemy".

Peter had been influenced by the enemy before, too.

Mark 8:33 (NET) ³³ But after turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, **Satan**. You are not setting your mind on God's interests, but on man's."

Peter responded in repentance, while Ananias refused to turn from his lie. "Yahweh is gracious" to those who turn from their sin, but He eventually brings judgment on those who continue to live in sin.

God's Judgment Falls

Acts 5:5-10 (NET) ⁵ When Ananias heard these words he collapsed and died, and great fear gripped all who heard about it. ⁶ So the young men came, wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. ⁷ After an interval of about three hours, his wife came in, but she did not know what had happened. ⁸ Peter said to her, "Tell me, were the two of you paid this amount for the land?" Sapphira said, "Yes, that much." ⁹ Peter then told her, "Why have you agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out!" ¹⁰ At once she collapsed at his feet and died. So when the young men came in, they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

Ananias collapsed and died...buried him. There was to be no funeral so others should mourn for him. Ananias had sinned against the Lord and the Lord of life - the one who gave him life - took his life. **Have you ever thought about that?** God could cause your next breath, to be your last!

When Sapphira, **his wife came in, but she did not know what had happened.**

Now's her chance to get honest. Instead, Sapphira - 'Ms. beautiful' acted like Satan too - and lied. God cares more about your inner beauty than your outer beauty - and you should too!

This is an example where spouses should NOT stand together. Sapphira should have told the truth, but instead chose to stand with her husband in deception, and it cost her life.

Response to God's Judgement

Acts 5:11 (NET)

¹¹ **Great fear gripped the whole church*** and all who heard about these things.

* This is the first mention of the Greek word *ekklēsia* in Acts (most often translated "**church**" in English translations). This word is used of both secular and sacred **assemblies** in the NT. It is also the term used in the LXX for God's people over 100 times (cf. Dt. 9:10; 1 Kgs. 8:65).³ For the NT, the meaning of *ekklēsia* as 'an assembly of God's people.'⁴

These deaths demonstrated that...

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³ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley; Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 397-400 .

⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 125.

Peter later wrote these words about God's judgement and God's people.

1 Peter 4:17 (NET) ¹⁷ For it is time for **judgment** to begin, **starting with the house of God**. And if it starts with us, what will be the fate of those who are disobedient to the gospel of God?

God was...God IS...serious about the purity of His people. Jesus DIED to make us righteous and now we are commanded & empowered to live in righteousness. What if we started living like real judgement was coming? What would change in our lives?

God's Pure Church & Powerful Presence

Acts 5:12-13 (NET) ¹² Now many miraculous signs and wonders came about among the people through the hands of the apostles. By common consent they were all meeting together in Solomon's Portico.¹³ **None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high honor.**

None of the rest is referring to non-believers - especially other Jews who might be within the vicinity at the temple, but who would not join them in Solomon's Portico. While the non-Christian community wouldn't join the followers of Jesus in Solomon's Portico, they **held** the believers **in high honor**. They saw real integrity in the lives of Christians.

☀ **John MacArthur** *The failure of churches to preach holy living, and to discipline those who don't live that way, allows sinners and hypocrites to remain in the church, convoluting its direction, sapping its power, robbing it of purity and marring its testimony. Men may build their churches with a tolerance for sin, but the Lord builds His among people who love holiness and hate and expose sin.*⁵

The person who doesn't claim Jesus is always welcome. While the person who claims Jesus will not be PERFECT, but they must be REPENTANT of their sin.

The Church on Mission

Acts 5:14-16 (NET) ¹⁴ **More and more believers in the Lord were added to their number,** crowds of both men and women. ¹⁵ Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets, and put them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow would fall on some of them. ¹⁶ A crowd of people from the towns around Jerusalem also came together, bringing the sick and those troubled by unclean spirits. They were all being healed.

People didn't come to the church gatherings to BE SAVED. They joined with the believers after they WERE SAVED! God was at work through His people, throughout the community! Further, God continued to reveal His Presence in powerful miracles, which led to more people hearing the message of Jesus! The healings pointed to the HEALER! * Remember, this is all happening inside **Jerusalem!** (where Jesus was tried, convicted, beaten, spit on, scourged, crucified, buried, AND...RESURRECTED from the dead!)

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., Acts, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 161.

Persecution of the Church

Acts 5:17-21 (NET) ¹⁷ Now the high priest rose up, and all those with him (that is, the religious party of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.¹⁸ They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, led them out, and said, ²⁰ "Go and stand in the temple courts and proclaim to the people all the words of this life." ²¹ When they heard this, they entered the temple courts at daybreak and began teaching.

Acts 5:28-29 (NET) ²⁸ ... "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood on us!" ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles replied, "**We must obey God rather than people.**"

We've seen this before - the same warning and same response. The apostles were more concerned about God's judgment than man's judgment. They knew that, ultimately,

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They would not - the could not - stay silent about Jesus. So the fired back.

Acts 5:30-33 (NET) ³⁰ The God of our forefathers raised up Jesus, whom you seized and killed by hanging him on a tree.³¹ God exalted him to his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.³² And we are witnesses of these events, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him." ³³ Now when they heard this, they became furious and wanted to execute them.

Jesus had warned the apostles about this before His crucifixion.

Mark 13:9 (NET) ⁹ "You must watch out for yourselves. You will be handed over to councils and **beaten** in the synagogues. You will stand before governors and kings **because of me**, as a **witness to them.**"

They were living for an audience of ONE!

Just before killing them, a wise leader named **Gamaliel** stepped up to speak. He was the most prominent rabbi of the time and one of the greatest in all antiquity⁶ - the one who trained the apostle Paul (who shows up in a couple of weeks). Gamaliel mentions other examples of how revolts had died out when the leaders were killed. Then Gamaliel warned:

Acts 5:38-39 (NET) ³⁸ So in this case I say to you, stay away from these men and leave them alone, because if this plan or this undertaking originates with people, it will come to nothing, ³⁹ but if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them, or you may even be found fighting against God." He convinced them,

⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., Acts, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 171.

Judgment & Warning to the Apostles

Acts 5:40-42 (NET) ⁴⁰ and they summoned the apostles and had them beaten. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them. ⁴¹ So they left the council **rejoicing** because **they had been considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.**⁴² And every day both in the temple courts and from house to house, **they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus was the Christ.**

This flogging used a whip of calf hide. The offender received 39 lashes while tied to a post bent over or lying on the ground. 1/3 of those blows - 13 lashes - would occur on the front of the body; 2/3 - 26 lashes - would strike the offender's back.⁷

They were **rejoicing** that they got to suffer for the ONE who had suffered for them! (Mark 13:9)

If that time were to ever come for us, we would be aware that...

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The question we must answer is not, "Will you DIE for Jesus" but "Will you LIVE for Jesus?"

Living for an audience of ONE enables us to:

- ➊ **Walk in Purity:** When you believe He says all you do - your actions & intentions change.
Are you walking in purity or are you living in sin?
- ➋ **Witness God's Power:** God will use the people who trust Him & seek Him.
Are you seeing God move in & through your life?
- ➌ **Worship Through Persecution:** Experience the Presence of Jesus in the middle of persecution!
Are you doing anything for Jesus that would make the enemy mad?

Read for next week: **Acts 6-7**

Please call us if we can answer any questions or help you in any way.

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⁷ Craig S. Keener, Acts: An Exegetical Commentary & 2: Introduction and 1:1-14:28, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012-2013), 1242.