

WEEKLY REFLECTION

The account given of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11 might be one of the most dramatic in Scripture—after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, members of the early church lived out their new life in Christ with a radical generosity. They felt compelled to sell their possessions and belongings, and to distribute the proceeds to anyone in need. (Acts 2:43) Ananias and Sapphira seem to follow the church's lead, but they secretly keep a portion of the proceeds back for themselves. They lie to the church, the apostles, and the Holy Spirit by stating otherwise. The result? As they are confronted by the apostle Peter about their sin, both husband and wife immediately fall down and breathe their last. (5:5, 10)

What happened was tragic in more ways than one: firstly, nowhere in Scripture does it state that members of the early church were required or pressured to sell all that they had for the good of the church. (v.4a) If anyone did so, it was because they had an understanding of the earth-shattering implications of the gospel, of God's death upon the cross for all. They then responded joyfully and willingly, submitting in kind. Secondly, Ananias and Sapphira's deception reveals not just a misunderstanding of the surrender required here, but also of God Himself. God never asked for their sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22), and their deception possibly stemmed from a desire to receive false accolades and praise for themselves.

It is also hard for us to wrap our heads around God's actions, as Scripture tells us that He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love. (Ps. 103:8) Yet God punished Ananias and Sapphira out of His great love for the church—if He had not acted to preserve the church's integrity from the very beginning, we might not be where we are today. Our God is indeed a God of mercy and love, but He is also holy and righteous.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION ONE:

We mentioned a disconnect between covenant and commitment on Sunday, that we often fail to surrender to Jesus what He demands of us / what we hope to offer to Him. Peter is a prime example, as he promised to always be by Jesus' side, yet denied Him three times at the time of His crucifixion.

What are some areas in your life where you can see that disconnect? What are some reasons for that gap? How does it compare with Ananias and Sapphira's deception? Have you ever been tempted to act similarly?

QUESTION TWO:

What might be some of the motivations behind Ananias and Sapphira's actions? How does Satan play a role in that? How would you respond if you were in their position, and how might you fight against the temptation towards deception?

QUESTION THREE:

While God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance (Rom. 2:4), at the same time we should not take it for granted. Ananias and Sapphira are a devastating example of what happens when we underestimate the holiness and righteousness of the Lord.

Take the time now to reflect on any sins that come to mind, particularly unconfessed sin. Reflect on God's holiness and righteousness, and how we could never reach His standards. As you practice confession with your life group and ask for forgiveness from God, remember to also give thanks for Jesus, whose sacrifice made all things possible as He rescued us from God's well-deserved wrath towards us.