

The Deadly Deception

June 27, 2010

Turn to **Acts 4:32**. We're going to talk this morning about a deadly deception. These scriptures are tough scriptures. Acts 2 tells us about the birth of the church, where the Holy Spirit fell, the wind of God blew, the fire of God fell, and 120 were filled with the Holy Spirit in the upper room. Three thousand got saved in one day, and this launched the church. So, let's look at **the church** in **Acts 4:32**.

"Now the multitude of those who believed (the saints) were of one heart and one soul." Thousands of people had one heart and one soul. They had **harmony, unity, and oneness**. In Acts 4, the church was almost a utopia. It was almost like paradise regained because they were in oneness.

In the average, run-of-the-mill church today there is fussing, fighting, and doctrinal debating; but this church was of one heart and one soul. I don't know about you, but I think that is what God wants in His church. It's amazing how we take minor things and make major issues out of them. We have to major on Jesus and make Christ the center issue! If we will major on the Master, these little issues are not important.

"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul, neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common." That means, if you saw that I had a need and you possessed the ability to meet my need, it didn't have to go through 14 committees in order for me to have my need met!

Do you realize how powerful Verse 32 is? They were in one heart and one soul, and people that saw and possessed the ability to meet someone's need just took care of it.

Look at **Verse 33**. What came out of this unity and harmony? "And with great power." **Power flows out of a church that is in unity, harmony, and oneness**. "And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace (favor) was upon them all."

The church was full of **great power, great witnessing, and great favor**. God was showing favor to them, but sometimes favor isn't fair. If you have harmony and unity in your home, you will be blessed. If you're fussing and fighting all the time, all you will have is division and strife; but if you will get in harmony and unity, you will be blessed.

Let me tell you what is wrong with the church today. The church today is weak because our homes are weak. People fight and argue over nothing. When our homes are in harmony, unity, and oneness, there will be great power in our homes, and favor will be in our homes.

Look at **Verse 34**. "Nor was there anyone among them who lacked, for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them." You do not see where the apostles demanded or commanded the people to sell their houses or lands. They did it on their own. They realized there was need, and their oneness helped them realize the needs of their brothers and sisters.

This verse doesn't say that these people sold ALL of their possessions. It says that "all of those who possessed houses or lands sold them." God had shown favor to these people who probably owned more than one house and one piece of property.

Let's look at what these people did with the money, the cash, they received from selling their possessions. It says, "They brought the proceeds of the things that were sold." **Verse 35** says, "And laid them at the

apostles' feet, and they distributed to each as anyone had need." They were sharing saints.

Today, churches are full of stingy people. In the average denomination, less than 2% of that denomination tithe. These people sold lands and houses and laid the proceeds at the apostles' feet. There was such a love for each other, such a wonderful move of the Holy Spirit that they were just bringing the proceeds in and laying them down.

The distrust factor is so great in the churches of America. People distrust the men of God, because there have been so many con-men and wackos in the church world in America. I want to recommend a book to you. It's called, The Holy Spirit Is Not For Sale. I challenge you to buy that book, because it will stir you up; but today, it's all about money.

When the money was laid down at the apostles' feet, "they distributed to each as anyone had need."
Donations came in, distributions went out. We tithe out 10% of everything that comes into this church. We help other churches and ministries outside of Maranatha, but we also help people every month; and not all, but many of those who request help don't put a penny into the offering bucket.

Listen, I'm not your ordinary preacher who smiles and tells you that all you have to do is think positive thoughts and God will lift you up. You have a responsibility. Brothers and Sisters, you have to loosen your heart, make sure you are doing what God tells you to do, and stop all the fighting and fussing so God can do something in the church!

In the midst of all this giving and selling, all of a sudden a name pops up. **Verse 36** tells us about Joses whose name had been changed to Barnabas. Barnabas was honored by the apostles. "And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement, a Levite (a priest) of the country of Cyprus."

Verse 37: "Having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." I want you to note in the next few minutes what ends up at the apostles' feet.

Barnabas was **filled with the Holy Ghost**. He was a **dedicated disciple**. He was an **encourager**. I pray that God would give me some encouragers! Barnabas was later used to introduce Saul, who became Paul, to the apostles at Jerusalem, and he stood with Paul. He was a **generous giver** and a **submitted servant** to the men of God. The church is in oneness, giving and helping one another.

Let's look now at **Acts 5:1. Corruption enters the church**. I don't know what your Bible says, but the first word in Verse 1 is "But." Only God would have put the next 11 verses in the Bible. If man had written it, the next 11 verses wouldn't have been included, because man is always trying to hide the sins of the church. Man is always trying to cover up sin, but God doesn't do that.

Satan tried to bring persecution to the church in Acts 3-4, but multitudes were being saved. Satan cannot destroy the church of the Living God through persecution. In Acts 5, he infiltrates the church with **corruption**. He brings **deceit and hypocrisy** in the church.

Verse 1: "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession." We don't know what that possession was, but Satan goes to work. **Verse 2:** "And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it." I do not believe the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was greed. I believe the **corruption of the church** came from Satan trying to infiltrate the church, and he found a willing couple to do his bidding.

Remember that Barnabas was singled out and honored by the apostles because of the kind of man he was, and Ananias and Sapphira wanted the same respect that Barnabas had. If you are going to get the same honor from God, you have to sacrifice at the same level, but it's not about giving the same amount. Barnabas gave 100% of what he sold. So the corruption is from Satan, but that was not what Ananias did.

"And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet." The cause of the corruption was not Satan. The cause of the corruption was that there was **sin** in the camp. It wasn't because Ananias kept some of the proceeds for himself. That was not the sin. They could have given a portion of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. It wasn't the AMOUNT they gave. It was the fact that they **pretended** to give 100% of the proceeds.

Somehow they had acknowledged to everyone that they were giving all of the proceeds of what they sold. **They were hypocrites!** A hypocrite is a pretender. The Greek word for hypocrisy is "actor." A hypocrite is pretending to be someone he/she is not. Let's look at how Jesus treated hypocrites.

A gospel being preached today is one where you can do just about anything you want to do, but that is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pretending to be a saint of God, a follower of Christ, and not living it and walking it is **a stench in God's nostrils**. Jesus called the hypocrites of that day "vipers and white-washed tombstones." He was so irritated that He drove them out of His Father's house twice with a whip.

If you will read the Bible, it says He did it at the beginning of His ministry and again at the end of His ministry. He cleansed the temple twice. Why? It's because they had made His Father's house a den of thieves; but in their eyes, they were religious followers of Jehovah. He told the prostitute, "Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more." How did He treat the lepers that no one would touch? He touched them, and they were made clean.

Ananias and Sapphira are **religious phonys**. They acted like they gave it all. That was their sin. It was the **sin of deception**. In **Matthew 6:2** Jesus says, "When you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward."

A deceptive spirit has been loosed on the church. We need some discernment in the house! When the message you are hearing, whether in the pulpit or on television, is all about money, that is not the gospel!

For Ananias and Sapphira, it was not about the money. It was about **their deception**. They were trying to be something they were not. They wanted the admiration, the respect and the honor Barnabas received without the sacrifice. They wanted to wear the badge but do nothing to earn it; but they dealt with the wrong man when they dealt with that fisherman called Peter, because Peter had the gift of discernment.

Look at **Verse 3**. "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?'" There is a sin that God will not forgive. It's called blaspheming of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that we can grieve and quench the Holy Spirit. Ananias wasn't lying to Peter. **He was lying to the Holy Spirit!** That was serious.

How do you think Ananias felt when Peter said, "Satan has filled your heart?" Let me tell you something. You can't have Satan and the Holy Spirit together in your heart. That doesn't work. Peter said, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?"

In **Verse 4** Peter says, "While it remained, was it not your own?" When something is in your hands, it's in your control. You can do with it as you please. Then Peter said, "And after it was sold, was it not in your own

control?" Ananias could have given whatever he wanted to give, but he lied and said he gave it all. Then Peter asked him, "Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." Peter gave him the chance to tell the truth, but he didn't.

In **Verse 5**, God is getting ready to **cleanse His church**. "Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down." Ananias fell down, but he didn't get back up. He "fell down and breathed his last." He died! "So great fear came upon all those who heard these things."

In **Verse 6** it says, "And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out and buried him." That was the Jewish way, but they didn't even tell his wife. Three hours later, here she comes. Three hours later, they are still having church. **Verse 7**: "Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened."

You would have thought that when she walked in someone would have said something about what had happened to her husband, but she walks right up to Peter. Look at what he says to her in **Verse 8**. "And Peter answered her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.' She said, 'Yes, for so much.'" I think he gave her a chance to tell the truth, just like he did Ananias, but she lied too. Oh my!

Verse 9: "Then Peter said to her, 'How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those (the young men) who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.'" **Verse 10**: "Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband."

That judgment was **swift**, it was **sudden**, and it was **severe**. In **1 Peter 4:17**, it says that judgment begins at the house of God.

In the Garden of Eden, God told Adam, "If you do it (eat from the forbidden tree), you will die." In **Joshua 7**, God wonderfully gave the children of Israel victory over Jericho, and He told them not to touch any of the spoils; but Achan took an expensive garment, gold and silver and hid them in his tent.

Then during the next battle, they couldn't figure out how they were so defeated; and God said to Joshua, "There is sin in the camp!" So Joshua brought the head of every tribe out. Finally, Achan confessed to what he had done, and he and every member of his family, along with all of their possessions, were wiped out. It was swift, sudden, and severe!

Something happened when the church was cleansed. This **cleaning created a cure**, and **this cure produced a revival**. **Verse 12** says miraculous signs and wonders started happening in a greater number than ever before. **Verse 13** says the people were fearful, but the fear of the Lord doesn't bring torment. The fear of the Lord will draw you to the Kingdom. It says "but the people esteemed them highly."

This cleansing of the church produced miraculous miracles, the church began to be honored, Jesus Christ began to be magnified, and **Verse 14** says, "And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." Multitudes began to get saved! Isn't that awesome?

Revival is not going to come until God cleanses His church. I thank God for His mercy, His grace, and His kindness. I don't know if you know this or not, but **the church belongs to Jesus**. It's His body. He purchased it with His own blood, and it is run and operated by the Holy Spirit.

God does not tolerate deception, pretension, or hypocrisy. We have to be honest with ourselves. Are we

obeying God? Are we doing what God tells us to do? God wants us to be in unity, harmony, and oneness.