

## The Church Is Purged

**Lesson Scope:** Acts 4:32 to Acts 5:16

*References in brackets refer to Acts 4 & 5 unless otherwise specified*

### Lesson Focus

The newly formed church consisted of about five thousand believers (4:4). By the Holy Spirit's aid, the apostles were preaching and witnessing despite the threats of the Jewish leaders. The rapidly growing church was unified and was giving significant attention to the material needs in the brotherhood.

Although the church was thriving, the devil was at work in the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira planting seeds of greed and hypocrisy. In the previous lesson we looked at perils from without the church. Now in this lesson we see perils within the church.

Just as God had moved through Peter to heal the lame man, He now revealed the sin to Peter and purged the church through the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. This swift judgment brought fear upon all. God, who knows all hearts, purifies the church by exposing hidden sin. A pure church enjoys divine approval and possesses power that witnesses mightily to the world.

It is very important to emphasize the seriousness of sin. No matter how great or small the sin may seem, we must view sin as God does. God does not always judge sin as swiftly as He did in this account, but His judgment will fall nevertheless. The emphasis must be on the importance of living free from sin.

An interesting study in preparation for this lesson could be studying the three greats in this text—great power; great grace, and great fear

**Lesson Aim:** To present principles for dealing with sin in the church.

**Theme Verses:** Ephesians 5:26-27. That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to

himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

## Lesson Text

### Unified

Acts 4:32-37

<sup>32</sup> (KJV) And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. <sup>33</sup> And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, <sup>35</sup> And laid *them* down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. <sup>36</sup> And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, *and* of the country of Cyprus, <sup>37</sup> Having land, sold *it*, and brought the money, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

### Purified

Acts 5:1-9

<sup>1</sup> (KJV) But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, <sup>2</sup> And kept back *part* of the price, his wife also being privy *to it*, and brought a certain part, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. <sup>3</sup> But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land? <sup>4</sup> Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. <sup>5</sup> And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. <sup>6</sup> And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried *him* out, and buried *him*. <sup>7</sup> And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. <sup>8</sup> And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. <sup>9</sup> Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband *are* at the door, and shall carry thee out. <sup>10</sup> Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up

the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying *her* forth, buried *her* by her husband. <sup>11</sup> And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

## **Multiplied**

**Acts 5:12-16**

<sup>12</sup> (KJV)

And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. <sup>13</sup> And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. <sup>14</sup> And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) <sup>15</sup> Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. <sup>16</sup> There came also a multitude *out* of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

## **Questions for Study**

### **Unified**

1. How did being of one heart and one soul help the church to deal with sin?
2. Is being part of a spiritually vibrant church enough to keep us from sin? Explain.

### **Purified**

3. What was Ananias and Sapphira's sin? What may have motivated the sin?
4. Why may we be tempted to think that Wrong thoughts are less serious than wrong deeds?
5. What lessons can we learn about dealing with sin in the church?
6. Why is lying to man the same as lying to God?

### **Multiplied**

7. What caused the contrasting responses in 5:13-14?
8. What are some blessings that result when church purity is maintained?

## **Analysing the Passage**

The church's love and unity produced a willingness to supply the needs in the brotherhood. What caused these needs? The church was growing

rapidly. Also, many non-resident believers likely stayed in Jerusalem for a time after their conversion at Pentecost, which left them without a regular income.

But (5:1) indicates a stark contrast between Barnabas, who was “full of the Holy Ghost and of faith” (11:24), and Ananias and Sapphira, who were full of hypocrisy and lying.

Privy (5:2) means that Sapphira was fully aware of the plan. This was premeditated sin—they both had full knowledge of what they were doing.

Peter accused Sapphira of agreeing with Ananias to “tempt the Spirit of the Lord” (5:9), or going against what they knew was right.

Peter’s words in 5:4 emphasize the New Testament principle of voluntary giving (also see 2 Corinthians 8).

## **Principles and Applications**

### **Unified**

1. The church must be scripturally unified to effectively deal with sin (4:32). What is sin? How do we know how to deal effectively with it? The answers are in God’s Word. We, as members of the church, must know the Word well enough to understand that the applications that are made are to help us avoid sin. If the church is united on Scriptural applications to deal with sin, then the Holy Spirit can work among us “convincing men of sin.”

2. Temptation to sin can arise amid spiritual prosperity (4:32-37).

When the church is growing and things are going well, the devil intensifies his attacks against the saints. He severely tempts those who are on fire for God. He wants us to forget that personal failure is possible even while we are part of a faithful church. May we remember to watch and pray lest we fall into temptation.

### **Purified**

3. Satan is the cause of sin in the church (5:3). “When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44).

Satan’s agenda is to destroy everything good that God has designed. He is determined to ruin the church’s purity, and every Christian who yields to temptation brings him one step closer to his goal. Satan targets

the spiritually strong. He also attempts to keep the fallen from rising again.

4. Sin may be hidden from men for a time, but not from God (5:3-4).

Why do we think that we can do wrong and no one will ever know? David must have thought that way when he sinned with Bathsheba. Achan hid the forbidden treasures under his tent and thought no one would find out.

We can harbor thoughts of bitterness and envy against our brother and think that it will not matter. Perhaps we say the right things publicly so others think well of us, yet we have a serious problem with our thought life. Disrespectful thoughts about those in authority are as serious as outright rebellion.

5. All sin is against God (5:4). Sin is transgression against God's moral law. "Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1 John 3:10). When we offend a brother and realize our wrong, our first thought may be that we have hurt him, but more seriously, we have transgressed against God. Man's feelings about his wrongdoing are not the measure of its sinfulness.

6. The Holy Spirit reveals hidden sin in a faithful church (5:3-4). As the church endeavours to remain pure, the Spirit will expose sin. He may bring conviction as we read and hear the Word. He may use individuals in the church as they share their concerns. We must be open to both using and receiving the brotherly address.

7. Church leaders are responsible to deal with sin in the church (5:3-4, 8-9). After giving a list of qualities for the Christian, Paul said in Titus 2:15, "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee." If am the one being dealt with over a "small" thing, do I realize that my leaders are fulfilling their God-given responsibility? I must accept that I was wrong and be grateful that God gives me the opportunity to repent. My "small" transgression is not small in God's eyes.

8. Dealing with sin in the church is necessary so that others may hear and fear (5:11). If there were no consequence for sin, would I understand its seriousness like I should? As discipline is administered in the brotherhood, those not involved should be warned and develop fear (see 1 Timothy 5:20). Sins such as fornication, persistent worldliness, and

pleasure seeking should be confessed publicly. Am I free from these sins?

9. Scriptural church discipline is effective as the whole church supports the disciplinary action (5:11). One who sides with a member who is disciplined is a “partaker of other men’s sins.” Brotherhood unity is a must for discipline to be redemptive.

### **Multiplied**

10. The properly disciplined church attracts sincere believers (5:13-14). If we tolerate deviations from God’s Word that other “Christian” churches accept, we have nothing to offer the world. Many churches today are struggling to keep their youth because they have lost true spiritual life. They have laid aside Biblical obedience in the name of love and acceptance. Do we appreciate our properly disciplined church?

11. A pure church enjoys spiritual power and divine blessings (5:12-16). God may grant healing for our bodies through the prayer of faithful saints, but most importantly, we can be washed and healed from the blight of sin. God gives spiritual power to overcome sin when we ask in faith and follow His directives for victory. Read Paul’s healing cure for the Corinthians’ spiritual lethargy (1 Corinthians 11:29-34).

### **Important Teachings**

1. The church must be scripturally unified to effectively deal with sin (4:32).
2. Temptation to sin can arise amid spiritual prosperity (4:32-37).
3. Satan is the cause of sin in the church (5:3).
4. Sin may be hidden from men for a time, but not from God (5:3-4).
5. All sin is against God (5:4).
6. The Holy Spirit reveals hidden sin in a faithful church (5:23-4).
7. Church leaders are responsible to deal with sin in the church (5:3-4, 8-9).
8. Dealing with sin in the church is necessary so that others may hear and fear (5:11).
9. Scriptural church discipline is effective as the whole church supports the disciplinary action (5:11).
10. The properly disciplined church attracts sincere believers (5:13-14).
11. A pure church enjoys spiritual power and divine blessings (5:12-16).

## Answers to Questions

1. How did being of one heart and one soul help the church to deal with sin?

There was a “multitude of them that believed,” and they all believed in the one true God. They were eager to obey the truth. Sharing their earthly goods helped them feel a sense of brotherhood. When we as a brotherhood are all thinking and moving in the same direction, we can, with God’s help, decide what is right and wrong in this ever-changing world.

2. Is being part of a spiritually vibrant church enough to keep us from sin? Explain.

No. We are each accountable to God and will personally answer to Him for how we live our lives. We can look and talk right on Sunday, but if we blend in with the world during the week, we will soon be involved in their sins. Ananias and Sapphira wanted both the esteem of the church for their sacrifice and the benefit of monetary gain. Giving in to their carnality was a personal choice, and they had to take the consequences personally.

3. What was Ananias and Sapphira’s sin? What may have motivated the sin?

They were hypocritical and deceitful in making it appear as though they had given all the money to the apostles when they had kept some for themselves. Sapphira was guilty of lying when Peter directly questioned her about the amount they had given. They wanted the praise and good thoughts of men. They were motivated by pride and tempted by the devil to commit this sin.

4. Why may we be tempted to think that wrong thoughts are less serious than wrong deeds?

Wrong thoughts seem hidden because other people are not aware of them, but God knows our thoughts even before we think them. Even though our thoughts are hidden from men, they will eventually express themselves in attitudes and words. “As [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). We will be judged by our thoughts as well as our deeds. If we have disrespectful thoughts toward the church leaders or the Bible school board, it is the same as outright rebellion.

5. What lessons can we learn about dealing with sin in the church?

Every Christian deals with the pull of the Adamic nature. No matter how righteous we think we are, we can still yield to temptation and

need to accept discipline. God views deceit seriously. Agreeing with and obeying one's husband does not excuse one from obeying God. Sin must be taken care of to keep Christ's bride pure and spotless. Dealing with sin encourages growth of sincere believers in the church.

6. Why is lying to man the same as lying to God?

God says all lying is sin. If our child lies to us, we discipline him.

We need to train them to be truthful to us and ultimately to God. All authority is ordained of God, so parents, teachers, and church leaders have the responsibility to punish for wrongdoing. If my "child" has signed their name, committing themselves to support the standards and cooperate with the Bible school administration and yet tries to sneak forbidden things in, are they not guilty of lying?

7. What caused the contrasting responses in 5:13-14?

The insincere were afraid to join this new church when they heard what had happened. They realized that a supernatural power was at work purging the dross from the gold. Those who were sincere wanted to be part of this church that was kept pure. They repented of their sin and were added to the Lord's side.

8. What are some blessings that result when church purity is maintained?

Each member will do all he can to keep his personal life pure and will warn others to keep the seeds of sin from germinating in their lives. All known sin will be confessed instead of being swept under the carpet. Those who are seeking for truth will be attracted because they have experienced sin and its bitter reaping and they want something better. Those who want what is right will appreciate a disciplined life.

A pure church is a lighthouse to the world.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

Where sin exists in the heart, it will show itself in the outer life. God's promise is: "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully . . . shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation" (Psalm 24:4~5).

**Research Guide. 1.** Read pages 367 and 368 in *Doctrines of the Bible*. Especially applicable are points 4-6. **2.** Read Proverbs 6:16-19.