

The Dangers of Hypocrisy

Acts 5:1-11

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Our family had a blast over Christmas as we all gathered in Virginia for a few days. We laughed a lot, ate a lot, and held our grandkids a lot.

One morning our son-in-law Matt (the one who had heart surgery and the father of Ruby) invited Lydia (the mother of Pip and Ezra) and I to join him for a “Spinning Class” at a Fitness Center. I agreed to go but honestly, I was thinking this sounded like a pretty wimpy workout. I pictured us pedaling some old exercise bikes while listening to music from the 80s.

Not thinking this would cause much sweat I decided to get up early and do my own workout on the elliptical at our hotel. After showering I put on some sweatpants and an old sweatshirt thinking if I didn’t get a good workout on the “Spinners,” at least I would sweat.

When we arrived at the Fitness Center, we were handed cards with numbers on them and told to hang them on our “Spinners” to make sure they didn’t run out of bikes. That was my first clue this was a pretty intense deal. Matt led us to a room filled with about 40 of these “Spinners” and we promptly hung our numbers on our bikes. As the room started to fill up, I quickly realized I was the oldest guy there.

Recognizing we were newbies; the trainer came up to Lydia and me to make a number of adjustments on our “Spinners” so they would fit just right. I started to wonder why it was so important to have the seat and handlebars at such precise measurements for such a leisurely ride.

When all the “Spinners” were filled with fitness-minded people, the trainer stepped to the platform and turned her mic on. She proceeded to explain how to use the “Spinner,” pointing out how to adjust the tension. She was really upbeat and smiley and told us we were in for a fun 50 minutes! We were instructed to keep pace with the music and to follow her lead. She jumped on her super shiny “Spinner” and started pedaling. I looked around smugly and started pedaling with my arms crossed, still thinking this was going to be a weak workout.

As the music picked up, she told us to take the tension knob and turn it two revolutions to the right. I was thinking, *“Finally, now I might work up a little*

sweat.” Then she cranked the music, and everyone started pedaling like mad. I looked around and saw all the “Spinners” in the room going at warp speed. I struggled to keep up. Just as I was starting to get the hang of it, she told us to move off our seats and start pumping like we were climbing up a steep mountain road. I almost fell off the pedals before regaining my balance. Then we were commanded to sit back down and pedal as hard as we could. A minute later, we were instructed to start climbing again.

These intense intervals went on for nearly an hour! It didn’t take me long to wonder why I wore sweatpants and a sweatshirt because I was soaked with sweat. The trainer looked over at me a few times to encourage me to keep going. About halfway through she saw I was struggling and said something like, *“If you think you can’t keep going, you can. It’s the New Year and now it’s time for a new you!”* Fearful I was going to be called out, I picked up my speed. When we were finished, I could barely walk.

I had underestimated the intensity required of this workout. In a similar way, it’s easy for us to underestimate the intensity God requires of us. Specifically, He calls out hypocrisy while calling us to holy living.

We’re picking up our verse-by-verse study of the Book of Acts. We’ll be in the first eleven verses of Acts 5. Before jumping in I came across a helpful outline of the main sections of the Bible that puts the Book of Acts into context. We’re reminded the whole Bible is about Jesus.

Old Testament	<i>Anticipation</i>
Gospels	<i>Manifestation</i>
Acts	<i>Proclamation</i>
Epistles	<i>Explanation</i>
Revelation	<i>Consummation</i>

Here’s a summary of where we’re headed: *The fear of God will help us be faithful to God.*

Let’s stand and listen to Acts 5:1-11: ***“But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 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. 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? 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.’ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.’ And she said, ‘Yes, for so much.’ 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.’ 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. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.”

There are several characters mentioned in this narrative – a married couple named Ananias and Sapphira, the Apostle Peter, a few young men, and the whole church. In order to help us better understand this passage, imagine I’m one of the young men (I realize that’s a stretch, especially after my spinning story). I’m going to retell this narrative from his perspective.

*In order to get a full sense of what happened it’s important to set this text in context. Chapter 4 ends by celebrating how Barnabas sold a field and laid the proceeds at the apostle’s feet. It was pretty cool how God’s people willingly gave of their possessions to help the poor among us. The unity we experienced along with a sense of purpose was palpable. Verse 33 describes how “**great power**” and “**great grace**” were at work among us. I hung out with ‘my people’ every chance I could get. You do the same, right?*

*Acts 5:1 begins with “**But,**” which is a word of contrast. Barnabas was looked up to for his extravagant generosity. Ananias and Sapphira wanted to get some props as well. They too had a piece of property and sold it, but instead of giving the entire amount, they kept some back for themselves. The phrase “**kept back**” means “to embezzle or pilfer.” They made a pretense of giving all the proceeds. I was reminded of what Jesus said about holy hypocrites in Matthew 23:5: “**They do all their deeds to be seen by others.**”*

I’ll never forget the pride on his face when he placed a pile of shekels at the apostles’ feet. Instead of getting applause, Peter called him out for his hypocrisy. I’m not sure how he knew but he did somehow. I was shocked by

how bold he was: **“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?”**

No matter how old we are or how long we've been walking with Christ, Satan is always tempting us to sin. The name **“Satan”** means, “adversary.” Like Paul says in *Ephesians 6*, the battle we all fight is not in physical places but in spiritual spaces.

Peter was quick to say Ananias didn't have to sell the land and even if he chose to sell it, he didn't have to give all of it to the church. The problem was he had lied about it. He was trying to put a 'spin' on his sin. In his hypocrisy, he was trying to hide his heart. It's interesting Peter says Satan filled his heart to lie but he also says that Ananias **“contrived this deed”** in his own heart. Satan deceived but Ananias did the deed. The same is true for us. Satan may tempt us, but we can't blame him when we sin.

BTW, you do know the younger generation has a keen hypocrisy meter, don't you? Many of the 'nones' today say they don't believe because of all the hypocrisy they see in those who say they are holy.

I wasn't expecting what happened next: **“When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last.”** Ananias expired and fell to the ground, right next to his mound of money. Some think Peter caused his death, but it was obvious this was a direct act of the Almighty's judgment.

The affect was immediate on us: **“And great fear came upon all who heard of it.”** The word **“great”** is “megas,” which means “huge or massive.” The word **“fear”** is “phobos,” which refers to “reverence or terror.” A sense of ferocious fear came upon **“all”** of us. One of your translations captures it well: **“And great fear gripped all who heard.”**

Here's where me and my buddies enter the narrative. Like the teens and twenty-somethings at Edgewood, we were ready to do whatever needed to be done. Peter nodded in our direction so we **“rose up and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.”** This may seem strange to you, but that's how burials happened in our day. We did it like this for sanitary reasons and to avoid ceremonial defilement.

Three hours later, Sapphira sauntered into the assembly with no clue about what happened to her husband. Peter gave her a chance to repent when he

asked, **“Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.”** As her hypocrisy filled her hollow heart, she replied, **“Yes, for so much.”**

Peter wasn't having any of it, so he said, “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.”

Ananias and Sapphira were in harmony about their hypocrisy, even though they were testing the Holy Spirit. BTW, sin affects both men and women, couples and singles.

Just as we were coming back into the service after burying Ananias, we saw Sapphira fall down and stop breathing. We didn't have to be asked what to do. We picked her up and buried her right next to her husband. Actually, it's hard to see in English but in Greek, it says we buried them face-to-face. They didn't face their hypocrisy while alive but would remind each other of it for eternity.

*It's hard for me to explain the affect this incident had on our church and on our community. Verse 11 captures it better than I could: **“And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.”** Along with great power and great grace, **“great fear”** came upon those who were following Christ and those who were not. BTW, this is the first time the word **“church”** is used in Acts.*

I hear people in your day say they wish the church was more like the church in the Book of Acts. I have two things to say about that. First, if you want that, fear God. Second, get ready to be persecuted.

Let's leave the 1st Century and come back to the 21st now.

Be Fervent about the Fear of God

While it's true believers have become friends with God through the new birth, it's equally true we must focus on fearing God. I fear the American church has lost the fear and awe of God.

As one example, a well-known evangelical church (not in this community) recently sang the song, *“Let it Go”* from the Disney movie *“Frozen.”* As fog billowed off the stage, I watched a preaching clip and heard the pastor make this statement after the song was sung: *“It's as if they [the songwriters] theologically, prophetically*

knew where I wanted to go with this sermon. Let it go so you might go into the unknown.”

Are you kidding me? A Disney Song as the theological basis for a sermon? Did he really mean the songwriters of Frozen have the gift of prophecy to know how to help this pastor preach?

It's pretty easy to take a potshot at another church, so I wonder how I've compromised my view of God. Do I see Him as holy? Do I reverently fear Him? Is Edgewood growing in the fear of God? Even as we enjoy having a beautiful facility, are we known more for being a community of God-fearers?

I've been challenged by a book I received as a gift for Christmas called, "Gospel Worship" by Jeremiah Burroughs, who lived 400 years ago. Here's one of the quotes I've been pondering: *"It is fitting that God should be glorified, whatever becomes of you. You are dear to God, but God's name is dearer to Him than you are."*

Since *the fear of God will help us be faithful to God*, let's lean in and listen to these passages...

1. **Leviticus 10:1-2:** *"Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. **And fire came out from before the LORD** and consumed them, and they died before the LORD."*
2. **Joshua 7:1,11,15:** *"But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan...of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel...Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings....And he who is taken with the devoted things **shall be burned with fire**, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done an outrageous thing in Israel."*
3. **2 Samuel 6:5-7:** *"And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. And when they came to the threshing floor of*

*Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. **And the anger of the LORD** was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.”*

4. *Jeremiah 32:40: “And I will put **the fear of me** in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.”*
5. *Acts 9:31: “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the **fear of the Lord** and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”*
6. *Acts 19:17: “And **fear fell upon them all**, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.”*
7. *Philippians 2:12: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation **with fear and trembling**.”*
8. *1 Peter 1:17: “And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves **with fear** throughout the time of your exile.”*
9. *Hebrews 11:7: “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, **in reverent fear** constructed an ark for the saving of his household.”*
10. *Hebrews 12:28-29: “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, **with reverence and awe**, for our God is a consuming fire.”*

Fellow followers, God is holy, holy, holy and we are called to fear Him. I often come back to a quote from A.W. Tozer: “*What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.*”

Implications and Applications

The fear of God will help us be faithful to God. Because Acts 5 is brimming with implications and applications, let’s ask God to help us put these truths into practice.

1. Don't love money but give generously and sincerely. Proverbs 15:27 says, *"Whoever is greedy for unjust gain troubles his own household."* 1 Timothy 6:10 adds this warning, *"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."*

The generosity of the people of Edgewood is contagious, isn't it? Nearly \$7,000 has come in to help our Go Team partners, Mike and Pam Hillhouse, transition back to the States after having to flee Burkina Faso. Grow Time giving has been amazing as well (we'll share more about that at our Annual Meeting Sunday at 5:00).

So many of you have discovered the truth of 2 Corinthians 9:6-7: *"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."*

This passage reminds us giving is not restricted to cash on hand but can also involve property or possessions, stocks or bonds, grain or gold. When we came back from the mission field, someone donated a car to us because we didn't have one. We've also had the joy of gifting a car to someone in need. If this is an area you need to grow in, make your giving a priority in 2020.

2. Repent of any known sin. Do you have any secret sins? Any fatal flaws or messed up motives? Have you been rationalizing some rebellion? Numbers 32:23: *"Be sure your sin will find you out."* Hebrews 4:13 is equally unsettling, *"And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."*

While it's easy to point out the sins of our society, it's humbling to admit God always begins by cleaning His own house according to 1 Peter 4:17: *"For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"*

3. Constantly battle against hypocrisy. It's telling that hypocrisy was the first sin dealt with in the early church. Jesus hated hypocrisy in those who were religious and always hit it hard. One example is found in Matthew 23:27-28: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and*

all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

Ray Stedman writes, “*The moment we start pretending to be what we really are not, death enters in.*” Romans 12:9 is a short verse and easy to memorize: “*Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.*”

4. Encourage young people to live on mission. I find it fascinating the young men “*arose*” and did what was needed, even though it was not an easy job. I love what God is doing among our teens and twenty-somethings! They might be referred to as Gen Z or Millennials, but I prefer to call them the “Jesus Generation!”

Are you aware over 65,000 college students gathered for worship and the Word in Atlanta for Passion 2020 a week ago? Last year, nearly 40,000 students attended, and they raised more than \$400,000 to translate the Bible for deaf people around the world. Since 2013, Passion Conferences have raised \$8.3 million to fight modern-day slavery.

This year they raised money for Share Light, a campaign to help translate the Bible into 6,000 languages that don’t have a Bible translation yet. This would make it possible for every person on the planet to experience the Bible in their own language during this generation’s lifetime! To symbolize that, a flame was lit in Jerusalem, where the first church was launched, and carried to Atlanta where students were encouraged to share the light with the world. Organizers were blown away when more than \$1.2 million came in!

Let’s bring this closer to home. Chris Rogers, one of our student ministry leaders, shared a text thread with me about a discussion he was having with EBC teens about obedience. It was really moving to see them wrestling with how to follow Christ today. At the end of it was a really deep quote. I thought maybe Chris had written it because I know he’s a deep guy. When I asked him, he told me it was from AJ Langworthy, who is 16 years old! Check it out: “*Basically you can obey God without loving Him, but you can’t love Him and not obey Him.*”

When I gave Chris props for pouring into students, he said, “*This is a group of students that are ‘getting it.’ Be ready for revival!*” How exciting to see 1 Timothy 4:12 being lived out here at Edgewood: “*Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.*”

5. When things are going well, Satan goes to work. In Acts 4, Satan sent persecution from without and in Acts 5, he stirred up problems within. In his commentary on Acts, John Peter Lange offers this insight: *“Where there is light, there will also be a shadow; where God builds a church, the devil builds a chapel at its side.”* The Apostle Paul gave this warning to the church in Ephesus in Acts 20:29: *“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.”* This is similar to what Jesus said in Matthew 13:25: *“His enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.”*

Here’s a warning for us. While there’s a lot of harmony and excitement right now as we celebrate people getting saved and baptized, Satan hates unity. We must be on our guard and put Ephesians 4:1-3 into practice: *“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

Related to this, let’s remain humble so we don’t become an example of 1 Corinthians 10:12: *“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”* Let’s take James 4:7 as our marching orders: *“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*

6. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. The best way to avoid hypocrisy is by being filled with the Holy Spirit. Go back to Acts 5:3 for a moment. Peter said, *“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?”* The word for *“filled”* has the idea of filling a hollow place. Listen. The best way to avoid being swayed by Satan is to make sure you are saturated with the Holy Spirit! If you’re hollow, Satan will fill you with unholy thoughts.

Ephesians 5:18 is a command: *“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”* The tense means we are to *“keep on being filled.”* The idea of being filled is synonymous with being controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Take Off Your Mask

I want to tell you how we’re going to end in a couple minutes so you can be prepared. During our closing song, I’m going to invite you to come up front as a way to seal a decision you’re ready to make.

As I see it, we have two options:

1. We can put a spin on our sin and spin out of control.

or...

2. We can grow in our fear of God and become more faithful to God.

Let's face it. We're all pretenders to some degree. Each of us struggle with trying to be something more than we really are. The truth is if God judged us for our hypocrisy like He did Ananias and Sapphira, we'd all be vaporized.

But God did judge someone, His one and only Son. He took all your sins and placed them on Jesus, who fell down and breathed His last by dying on the Cross.

If you've never been saved, call out to Him now. Repent and receive the free gift of forgiveness so you can be set free from your sins. If you're ready to do that, you could pray something like this...

God, I confess I am a pretender. I'm not only a hypocrite but I am a sinner and my sins are consuming me. I repent of how I've been living and turn now to You. Thank You for sending Your Son Jesus to die in my place on the Cross and to rise again on the third day. I believe and I now receive Jesus into my life. Save me from my sins and make me born again. Teach me to fear You so I can be faithful to You the rest of my life. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.

If you're already a Christian but have been compromising in some way, confess your hypocrisy to Him right now. If you're backslidden, it's time to come back. If you're saved but you're not living a surrendered life, make this the day you rededicate yourself to Christ.

After I almost spun out of control on the Spinner, Beth and I took a brave spin by having Pip and Ezra spend the night with us in our hotel room. After taking them swimming to tire them out, we put their pajamas on and got them ready for bed.

Ezra fell asleep quickly, but Pip was a bit more anxious and had a hard time closing his eyes (maybe he was smelling my sweatshirt from my spinning class). After trying many things, Beth noticed he kept staring at the light outside the

bathroom. She asked him why he was doing this, and he said, *“I just try to keep looking at the light and then I don’t get scared of the dark.”*

On Facetime this week, I asked Pip for permission to tell this story and he said, *“That’s fine, Pa but that reminds me of a song.”* He then starting singing, *“This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine...”*

We’re going to end by staring at the light of God’s holiness as we sing, “Holy, Holy, Holy.”

I want to invite you to come down front if you’re in need of salvation or of surrender.

Closing Song: “Holy, Holy, Holy”