

# One for All, All for One

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[ 0 : 00 ] Acts 4, 32. Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul.

And no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power, the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

And great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it all at the apostles' feet.

And it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

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.

[ 1 : 18 ] 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 men, 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 man 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?

[ 2 : 27 ] 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 these things. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

Troy Polamalu is a two-time Super Bowl champion with the Pittsburgh Steelers. He was inducted into the Football Hall of Fame last year.

And he is a vocal Christian who has spoken often of how the humility and sacrifice that the Christian life requires has helped him in his football career.

And he says that football likewise requires a selflessness in the name of greater good. When he was voted the most valuable player on his team one year, he said, quote, I've never been a fan of individual awards because football is such a team sport.

[ 3 : 35 ] There's so many things that goes into making plays. It's about teammates trusting one another and working together. When an individual plays selfishly in an attempt to keep the spotlight on himself, the team inevitably suffers.

That's why there are players in various team sports who are exceptionally talented and have stellar individual stats, and yet when you add them to a new team, that team curiously gets worse, not better.

That's because these players lift themselves up at the expense of others rather than humbling themselves and making personal sacrifices in the service of the team. In Acts 4, 32 to 5, 11, we see a similar dynamic in play.

We are given a positive example of Barnabas who makes personal sacrifices for the sake of the church, and we're also given a negative example of Ananias and Sapphira who seek to elevate their personal standing within the church using deceit.

And the main point of this passage is that the filling of the Holy Spirit enables the church to bear witness to Jesus with one heart and soul. We're going to first look at the unity of the church filled by the Spirit, and then we're going to look at the duplicity of those filled by Satan.

[ 5 : 05 ] First, we see a wonderful picture of the unity of the church filled by the Spirit. It says in verse 32, Now the full number of those who believe were of one heart and soul.

The full number of believers refers to the multitude. It's the same word that's sometimes translated congregation. It's a reference to the gathered church. And they were of one heart and one soul.

The many, the multitude, were one. The heart, in Jewish understanding, is the effective center of a person, the seed of one's thoughts, the seed of one's emotions, intentions.

Proverbs chapter 4, verse 23, says that from the heart flows the springs of life. The heart, in other words, is the source of our words and actions, all that we do.

Similarly, the soul, in Jewish understanding, refers to the life and vitality of a person. Together, the words heart and soul refer to the totality of your inner self.

[ 6 : 08 ] When you put your heart into something, when you put your heart and soul into something, it doesn't mean that you're just putting a part of yourself into it. It means you're putting all of yourself into it.

So likewise, the first Christians were of one heart and soul. They were united in their purposes and priorities. They were of one mind. And one tangible evidence of this unity was that they shared what belonged to them, their possessions.

It says in verse 32, And no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. The full number was one, and no one selfishly refused to share what belonged to him or her.

What was one's own was held in common. So we could call this common ownership. But this is not a socialistic community where private ownership is abolished.

People still own things, and those things are at their disposal, as we will see clearly in Peter's conversation with Ananias. But nobody insists that his things are his own.

[ 7 : 23 ] Meaning he doesn't keep those things to himself, but freely shares them voluntarily. So perhaps common use is a more accurate description than common ownership of property.

I've personally seen many of you do this for one person or another in our church, whether it's sharing or giving away an unused phone or headphones or to someone who had need of it, or whether it's sharing your drill, your tent, your car, or even your house with someone who has need. So the early church likewise shared everything in common. They also had a common message.

Verse 33 says, And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

This is the common mission that God's people were driven by, to give their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Bearing witness to the fact that Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead and now reigns at the right hand of the Heavenly Father.

That's the church's mission. We must never lose sight of that mission. In the book entitled Mission Drift, The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches, Peter Greer and Chris Horst contrast originally Christian organizations that drifted from their mission.

[ 8 : 53 ] Like Harvard University, Child Fund, and YMCA. To organizations that stayed true to their explicitly Christian mission and values. Like Taylor University, and Compassion International.

And they argue that this mission drift happens slowly and gradually, almost imperceptibly. They call it in one of their chapters, Death by Minnows. They write, quote, Too often the passions of the first generation become the preferences of the second and are irrelevant to the third generation.

The authors of that book originally set out, according to their own testimony, to write the book thinking that mission drift was an organizational issue. But in the course of their research and writing, they changed their hypothesis and concluded that the mission drift is not an organizational problem, but a human problem.

Quote, Individuals foiled by pride and sin and allured by success. They're the ones who drive mission drift. They continue, quote, Pride leads us to adopt the wrong definition of success.

When we begin to see our priority as a growing ministry instead of a faithful one, we sow the seeds of drift. As we go through the book of Acts and as we've seen already in the first four chapters, it's tempting to try to replicate the explosive growth and visible success of the early church.

[10:27] It's tempting to try to replicate that using the various techniques and strategies and values of the modern world, but instead of fixating on what works from our limited human perspective, we need to focus on what the Lord has commanded us.

The Lord has commanded us to bear witness to His life and death and resurrection, to make disciples of all nations. Our goal isn't a large, successful church, but a church that faithfully bears witness to Jesus.

The church in Acts 4 did not lose sight of this mission, and their ministry was attended, it says, with great power and great grace, according to verse 33.

The power is the power of the Holy Spirit, which has been mentioned numerous times in Acts, and it refers to the power with which God performed many miracles through the apostles to corroborate the message that they were proclaiming, the gospel that they were proclaiming.

The grace similarly refers to the grace of God. In Acts chapter 11, verse 21 to 23, it says that, So this is the grace of God to see what was happening, and it says that, when he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

[12:03] So this is the grace of God that is in view when it says here in Acts 4.33 that grace, great grace was upon them all. Grace is the favor of God. It is his favorable disposition and blessing toward his people, which is evidenced in many people turning to faith in the Lord.

Whenever the church experiences great revival in history, when the gospel is boldly proclaimed and many people repent of their sins and believe in Jesus and God's power is displayed in signs and wonders, whenever such revivals break out in history, it's always the result of great power and great grace of God.

In other words, the source of such revival is the filling of the Holy Spirit. Remember what we learned from the preceding passage last week.

It said in Acts 4.31, and when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness.

The ongoing revival we see here in verses 32 to 37 is a result of that filling of the Holy Spirit in response to the concerted prayers of the church.

[13:16] On a static, you know, pond, boats can go all kinds of directions, right? Depending on which way people are rowing, depending on which direction the wind is blowing.

People are all doing their own thing on such a pond. But as soon as you put those boats down on the rapids, they all start going down in the same direction in the irresistible flow of the river.

In the same way, people who are doing different things and living for different reasons, when they come under the mighty torrent of the Holy Spirit, they all start flowing in the same direction.

The many become one. And that's what's happened here. And once again, Luke tells us in verses 34 to 35, one obvious evidence of this unity is the way they generously and sacrificially give to one another.

Luke returns to this theme because he wants to give us two examples of this, specific examples of this. We saw earlier that they share the things that they owned, but that's not all they did.

[14:32] They also sold the things that they owned to give away the proceeds to their Christian brothers and sisters who needed them. So he says in verses 34 and 35, there was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet.

And it was distributed to each as any had need. There was no needy person. Why? For as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and gave the proceeds to distribute it to each as any had need.

Any who had need was satisfied because the many who had generously gave. Whenever there was someone with need, someone with means rose to meet that need.

The landowners and homeowners did not insist on keeping their properties to themselves. They could have said, well, do you know how hard I work to save up for this house?

Do you know how many years of backbreaking labor it took me to buy this parcel of land? They were entitled to that.

[ 15 : 43 ] The land was deeded to their name. But instead of selfishly insisting on their right, they sacrificially surrendered their right for the sake of their fellow church members.

I said earlier that this is not a socialistic community where private ownership is abolished. But it's also true that this is not a capitalistic community where private ownership is prized and guarded and where the desire to increase one's own capital governs all commercial dealings.

It's like comparing apples and oranges because the early church functioned not as an economy but as a family. The clause, there was not a needy person among them echoes an Old Testament ideal within the family of God.

The word needy occurs only once in the entire New Testament right here. And it's the same word that occurs in the ancient Greek translation of Deuteronomy chapter 15 verse 4 where it says, but there will be no needy person among you.

Acts 4.34 is a fulfillment of that word. This command in Deuteronomy is given in the context of directions about the sabbatical year, a year of rest.

[ 17 : 04 ] Jewish lenders were permitted to exact what was owed to them from their borrowers if those borrowers were foreigners. However, they were forbidden from exacting what was owed to them from their fellow Jews.

And when the sabbath year came, the seventh year of rest came, they were commanded to forgive any outstanding loan of their Jewish brethren. So it says in Deuteronomy 15 verse 2, every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor.

He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the Lord's release has been proclaimed. This is how family works.

I recently received a check for serving on jury duty. It's not much and the tax is already taken out. But it's money that I earned with the work that I did and the check had my name on it.

But it really doesn't matter in the end because it all goes into the family bank account. In fact, I told Hannah that I'm giving my jury check to her to use as she desires since she had to work extra hard at home to make sure I can go to jury duty and then do church work at night and weekends because I wouldn't have been able to serve on that jury if it weren't for her.

[ 18 : 28 ] Some of the money undoubtedly will end up going to our kids who are net negative on our account. They don't contribute to our family's earning in any way.

In fact, they're quite a drain. But that's how families work. They take care of each other's needs. They share what belongs to them with one another.

So it is within the family of God. The church is the family of God. Church is not a worship service that you attend or a building that you enter into. It's a congregation of believers as it says in chapter 4 verse 32.

The full number or congregation the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul. The church is a gathering of people a community of followers of Jesus Christ who meet together for prayer and teaching and the breaking of bread who live closely enough to know each other's needs and who love each other enough to meet those needs as they arise.

And I want to commend many of you who have done this within our church as well. Some of you have used your own money to pay for another member's medical expense or housing expense.

[ 19 : 50 ] Note that at this point in the book of Acts the church did not have its formal structure with the elders and the deacons as specified in 1 Timothy chapter 3. At this point there's still only one church in all the world the church in Jerusalem and the apostles functioned as the elders of that church.

This is why people bring the proceeds of what was sold and laid at the apostles' feet. The apostles being leaders of the church had a fuller picture of the various needs within the church and by having them coordinate the distribution of funds they made sure that every need was met and that there wasn't any reduplication of efforts with several people trying to meet the same need not knowing that it was already met.

This is what we do as a local church as well when we take up offerings for a collective fund. It's what we did at our members meeting last Sunday when we established the benevolence fund for future deacons to allocate to those who are in need.

Having made his point about the unity of the church and how they met one another's needs Luke now gives us two specific examples a positive one and a negative one. We see the positive example in verses 36 to 37.

Thus Joseph who was also called by the apostles Barnabas which means son of encouragement a Levite a native of Cyprus sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles feet.

[ 21 : 15 ] This brother's name was Joseph but we know him by his more famous nickname which the apostles called him by Barnabas which means son of encouragement.

He's one of the most prominent believers in the book of Acts. His name occurs again and again and we'll encounter him many times and it's not surprising for that reason that the apostles had a special nickname for him.

And what a great nickname son of encouragement. To refer to someone as a son of something is an idiomatic way in Hebrew to describe the character of a person and because the Greek New Testament is influenced written by Jews it reflects that influence.

So a son of Ephesians 5, 6 calls disobedient people son of disobedience. So then a son of encouragement is someone who is often given toward encouraging others.

If encouragement had a son it would look like Barnabas. The word encouragement means to exhort and embolden another person in his or her belief or course of action.

[ 22 : 23 ] The same word is used later in chapter 9 verse 31 to refer to the comfort of the Holy Spirit. He's a son who gives comfort to others brings encouragement to others.

We see him doing this often throughout the book of Acts. When Paul returned to Jerusalem after his conversion the apostles were wary of him knowing his reputation as a fierce persecutor of the church.

However, it's Barnabas who personally takes Paul by his hand and introduces him to the apostles assuring them that he has genuinely converted and that he's safe.

In Acts chapter 9 verse 27 When a new church begins to take shape in Antioch the apostles send who? Barnabas. They're to encourage them and build them up.

Acts 11 22-26 And then when those same Christians in Antioch hear a prophecy that anticipates a famine throughout Judea they send relief by the hand of Barnabas.

[ 23 : 29 ] When Paul insists on not taking John Mark along with him on their missionary journey being unwilling to give Mark a second chance because Mark had deserted them in one leg of the journey previously it's Barnabas who insists on giving Mark a second chance is in Acts chapter 15 verse 37-40 Paul virtually admits later in his life that Barnabas was right because in 2 Timothy 4-11 he asks Timothy to get Mark and bring him with you for he's very useful to me in my ministry.

So Joseph was a godly man who was often encouraging other believers and building up the church so he was nicknamed Barnabas and fittingly Barnabas sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money to and laid it at the apostles' feet so that it might be used to meet the needs of the saints. While Levites were not given an inheritance in the land of Israel by this time Israel was not a theocracy governed by the Mosaic law rather they were a conquered nation subjects of the Roman Empire and so under these changed circumstances it appears Levites also owned land.

So Barnabas a Levite sold his land and donated it to the church. But lest you think that this is just an idealized depiction of the early church Luke gives us a negative example as well.

The early church was not perfect. Wherever the spirit of God is powerfully at work Satan always tries to do his worst. And we see this beginning in chapter 5 says in verses 1-2 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.

[ 25 : 24 ] It's clear that Ananias and Sapphira were part of the Christian community in Jerusalem. They knew who the apostles were and they knew that it was common practice to sell one's property and bring the proceeds to the apostles to be distributed to those who are in need.

But Jesus also taught us in Matthew 13 24-30 that among God's people there will always be weeds mixed in with the wheat and that it will not be possible to separate them out until the last day the judgment day.

So it's possible that Ananias and Sapphira were not genuine believers. Considering the divine judgment that befalls them later I think it's possible that they were not true Christians.

But Peter prophetically sees right through Ananias and Sapphira's deception and he asks Ananias a series of questions in verses 3-4.

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 on sold did it not remain your own?

[ 26 : 27 ] 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. Peter's questions reveal exactly what Ananias and Sapphira did wrong.

First, they had no obligation to sell their piece of land. Peter says, while it remained on sold did it not remain your own?

There was no church policy demanding that everybody relinquish their property and bring it to the apostles. it was theirs to do with it whatever they pleased and yet he sold they decided to sell it.

Second, after selling it Ananias and Sapphira did not have the obligation to donate any or all of the proceeds to the church. Peter says, and after it was sold was it not at your disposal?

You could have kept 100% of the proceeds for yourself or you could have kept 80% of the proceeds for yourself and then donated 20% to the church. Nobody would have faulted you for it.

[ 27 : 37 ] You could have done whatever you wanted with the proceeds from the sale. It was your money. The problem was not that Ananias and Sapphira withheld part of the proceeds.

The problem was that they withheld the proceeds while lying that they were donating all of the proceeds. The problem was not that they were cheap.

Even donating a part of the proceeds would have been very generous. The problem was not that they were withholding what they had already dedicated to God. The money was theirs to dispose of as they wish.

The problem was that they lied to God. And why would they do something like this? Well, because Joseph had recently donated all of his proceeds from the sale of his land and the apostles and the rest of the church loved him.

They even gave him a nickname. They called him Barnabas, son of encouragement. Ananias' name means the Lord has shown favor, but the favor of God shown in Jesus wasn't enough for him.

[ 28 : 57 ] He wanted man's favor. He wanted man's acclaim. He wanted to be a beloved of the apostles.

I want to call me a son of generosity. Maybe you can be called the daughter of hospitality, Saphira. Oh, but I really want some of that money too.

Hey, I've got an idea. Since we got a great deal on this sale, we can just give a part of the proceeds and it will still look like we are giving away the entirety of our profit. This way we can have the best of both worlds, a sterling reputation in the church and sparkling riches at home.

How about that idea? But nothing can be hidden from the all-knowing and all-seeing God. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

If we say we have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. every single person in the universe stands completely exposed before the light of God.

[ 30 : 13 ] So God reveals Ananias and Sapphira's duplicity to Peter and Peter gets right to the heart of the issue. Twice he repeats the word heart. He says in verse 3, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?

And again in verse 4, why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God. We see both Satan and Ananias' own sinful flesh at work here.

Satan has filled his heart and Ananias has contrived the misdeed in his own heart. And notice the contrast between this description of Ananias and the description of the believers early in chapter 4 verse 31, where he said that they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

When the church is filled by the Holy Spirit, there is unity. unity. But when its members like Ananias are filled instead by Satan, there is duplicity and disunity.

Earlier in chapter 4, verse 32, it said the believers were of one heart, but Ananias and Sapphira were not one of them because they let Satan fill their hearts. So their hearts were divided, double-minded.

[ 31 : 28 ] Brothers and sisters, be watchful of your heart. When your heart is full of envy of another church member, when your heart is full of rivalry, when your heart is full of desire for man's approval or acclaim, when your heart is full of pride that thinks it can hide things from God, that is not the work of the Holy Spirit but the work of Satan.

Such attitudes are destructive to the church, it sows discord. When we see one another not as teammates, members of the same family of God, but as competitors, when we are out to gain glory for ourselves rather than for God, we begin to act independently instead of interdependently as we should.

Different parts of the same body vying for prominence instead of each doing its part for the benefit of the whole. It's not the way it's meant to be.

Do you struggle with envy when you see another brother or sister in the church enjoying the favor of other members and or the leaders of the church? Do you feel tempted to do good deeds, to serve diligently, to speak knowledgeably, or to give generously, not primarily out of your love for God and for his people, but out of your desire for recognition?

That's what Ananias was doing. And God would not stand for it. It says in verses 5 to 6, when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last.

[ 33 : 19 ] And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young man rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. Peter neither condemns nor curses Ananias, yet God himself brings down this spontaneous judgment, and Ananias falls down and breathes his last.

Maybe he died of a heart attack at the shock and shame of being exposed in public like that. We can't know for sure, but what we do know is that this was an act of divine judgment. The result of that judgment was great fear among all those who heard it.

Great power and great grace were upon the church in verse 33, and this inspires great fear among all those who hear of the mighty acts of God. Verse 7 says, After an interval of about three hours, Ananias' wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

This is ironic. Early in verse 2, a slightly different form of the same word to know was used to tell us that Ananias, with his wife's knowledge, kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.

At that time, it was only Sapphira who was in the know, so to speak. Only she was aware of her husband's ploy, or so she thought. But now, Sapphira is the only person who is not in the know.

[ 34 : 45 ] Peter knows, the young man who carried out Ananias' corpse knows, and of course God knows, but Sapphira herself does not know what has happened.

May this be a warning to those of us who think that we can hide things from God and get away with sin. We might deceive man, but we can never deceive the all-knowing God.

If you think you know something that God doesn't know in truth, you're the one who doesn't know what God knows. Peter asks Sapphira in verse 8, tell me whether you sold the land for so much. It's possible that Peter was at this point unaware that Sapphira was Ananias' partner in crime, in which case he's trying to determine Sapphira's knowledge and role in the matter. If Peter already knew prophetically that Sapphira was part of the ploy, then he is here offering her a second chance to repent and tell the truth.

Is the money that your husband dropped off earlier today really the full amount that you received for the sale of your land? And Sapphira responds, yes, for so much. And Peter says, how is it that you have agreed together to test the spirit of the Lord?

[ 36 : 04 ] 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 once again, the result is great fear that came upon the whole church and upon all those who heard of these things. Why does God act with such severe immediate judgment of Ananias and Sapphira?

Verse 3 says that Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit. Verse 4 says that he lied not to man but to God. Similarly, verse 9 says that Ananias and Sapphira agreed to test the spirit of the Lord.

That's the crux of the matter. Lying to God, or to put it another way, testing God is a serious offense. First, Ananias and Sapphira were lying to God.

They lied to Peter and the apostles, but Peter says that in doing so, they have not lied to man but to God. Peter's not claiming to be God. He's rather speaking like Jesus does later in Acts chapter 9, verse 4.

[ 37 : 11 ] The risen Jesus says to Saul who was persecuting the church, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Because the church is the body of Christ and Christ is the head of the church.

The church is the temple of the very spirit of God. To persecute the church, then it's to persecute Christ himself. And in trying to deceive the church and its representatives, Ananias sought to deceive God himself.

When children are little, it's patently obvious that they are lying. That's the case with some adults too, but especially with very young children. So it's almost cute when a parent catches a child doing that.

But the case of Ananias and Sapphira is far worse than that. It's absurd to think that one can deceive the omniscient God. In fact, to lie to him is to make a mockery of him.

You don't really see all that I do, do you? You don't really know everything I know, do you? You're not really God, are you?

[ 38 : 27 ] Ananias and Sapphira lied to God, and in doing so, they were also testing God. When the Israelites tested God in the wilderness, God called it rebellion in Psalm 78.

to test God in this instance is to know that something is wrong, but to do it anyway in defiance of God, to test him, to see whether God is really serious about his prohibition or not, to test it to see whether God will really react or not.

Sorry for all the parenting analogies here, but there comes a moment in parenting when you realize that your toddler is not the innocent angel that you thought he or she was, but a willful, sinful human being like the rest of us.

We have a plant in our house whose leaf is poisonous to humans if you consume it. It's fittingly called a snake plant. And of course, our toddler likes to crawl over to this plant, rip off the leaves, and try to eat it.

One time, she was trying to do exactly this as I was watching her, and I looked her in the eyes and told her, no, you can't eat that, no. And then she looked at me very intently with a serious look on her face, and I knew she understood exactly what I was telling her.

[ 39 : 53 ] And then after a few seconds of staring me down and as if daring me to do something about it, she began to test me by proceeding to rip off the leaf. I got even closer to her and told her again, no.

And this time, she knew she couldn't get away with it. So she looked at me with the saddest little face and started crying. Thankfully, she doesn't do that anymore.

She hasn't tried it since. Doing the wrong thing unknowingly is one thing, but to do it knowingly, willfully, that's something else.

That's hubris, defiance, rebellion, and it must be addressed. And Ananias and Sapphira agreed together to test the spirit of the Lord.

And that's a serious offense because God is not someone to be trifled with. He's not someone you can treat lightly. I love this illustration from The Chronicles of Narnia, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.

[ 41 : 07 ] When Mr. Beaver is talking to Susan, Mr. Beaver says, Aslan is a lion, the lion, the great lion. Oh, said Susan, I thought he was a man.

Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion. Safe? said Mr. Beaver. Who said anything about safe?

Of course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you. God's the king.

He is holy. He sits enthroned far above the heavens. And yet we sometimes think that God is someone who will put up with endless indignities at our own sinful hands and never respond.

God is the king. If this instance of divine judgment makes you uneasy, you're not alone. That's in fact the appropriate response.

[ 42 : 22 ] That's why twice we are told that great fear came upon all those who heard this incident. Later, chapter 5, verse 13, it says, none of the rest there joined them, the church, but the people held them in high esteem.

Unbelievers who observed the kinds of things that were happening in the church realized that God is holy, that his church is sacred, so they were careful around the gathering of believers. They did not treat them irreverently or flippantly.

They treated the church with respect. They didn't saunter over to a church gathering like a cackling spectator at a carnival. They wouldn't dare to do that.

When we see a terrifying act of judgment like the one we see here in this passage, we need to be reminded that God is a holy God who hates sin and judges sinners. Even if you don't receive

immediate judgment like Ananias and Sapphira, every sinner will receive ultimate judgment, on the final judgment day when Christ returns.

God created all of us for His glory to obey Him and to represent Him, but we have all defied His authority, rebelled against Him, and that's what we call sin.

[ 43 : 40 ] And apart from divine intervention, we are all liable to the same punishment that befell Ananias and Sapphira, death. And physical death is just a symptom of spiritual death, our separation from God.

And if we don't repent of our sins and receive forgiveness from God for our sins, we will be punished with the second death, eternal separation from God. But it's precisely because God's judgment is so real that God's mercy is also so real.

sin. You don't feel that God's mercy, the power of it, until you have felt viscerally the impending doom, the threat of God's judgment.

it. We can't save ourselves from Ananias and Sapphira's fate because that's what we all deserve. But God in mercy sent His only Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins.

We should have been exposed in all our nakedness of sin and shame. But instead, Jesus hung naked on the cross, exposed in shame, bearing our sin.

[ 44 : 58 ] We should have been punished for our willful rebellion against God, but instead, Jesus, the perfectly obedient Son, bore the punishment for our treason and endured the just wrath of God, His Father.

And having paid the price, Jesus rose in victory from the dead so that all those who put their trust in Him might be forgiven and reconciled to God.

so that we might no longer be under God's judgment, but under His mercy. If you're not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, if you're not yet a part of the church, the congregation of God's people, then now is your chance.

Because there is no turning back after death. Notice the finality with which Ananias and Sapphira's death is described. Ananias, breathe his last. Sapphira, breathe her last.

Once we draw our last breath and expire, there can be no turning back to God. So turn to Jesus today and receive His mercy rather than judgment.

[ 46 : 13 ] For those of us who are already members of the church of God, let's pray continually and seek the filling of the Holy Spirit. who enables us to bear witness to Jesus with one heart and soul.

Let's respond to this message by praying. God. Godcue the God, God, God, God,