

You can't get away with anything! Acts 4:32-5:11

You can't get away with anything with God!

**Have you done** anything wrong and tried to get away with it? There was one occasion when we were home alone during school holidays. Mum and Dad were working. We had a friend around. We decided to turn the lounge chairs into a trampoline. We bounced on them to see how high we could get. Everything was going well until our friend bounced and then there was a crack. The frame had cracked. It did not look too bad and so we stopped.

All was going well. Our parents had not noticed it until my father sat in the chair. There was an almighty crack and the chair broke and Dad was on the floor. Needless to say an explanation was warranted. We got terrible belting and Dad went to our friends place to confront the parents.

Have you tried to get away with anything and been found out?

Today's reading is about being found out and the consequences were terrible!

**Luke reports that** the fledgling church was developing their life together. 5000 people had responded to the gospel of Jesus' resurrection. They had come from a cross section of the community and now they were developing their community life together.

Luke reports: *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. 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.*

As we look at this passage the key word is great.

**First** there was great Unity. There were in one heart and mind. We would say that they were on the same page or they had bought into the program. As I shared last week, one cannot underestimate the power of Unity in the body of Christ. It is what Jesus prayed for that the church would be one as he and the Father were one. Sadly the history of the church has been great disunity rather than great unity. But if the church or congregation would be one as Jesus and the Father were one, then there would be great outcomes. As we see in this passage,

**Secondly** there was great Power. It is not surprising that Luke would emphasize the fact that “great power” was demonstrated through the hands of the apostles. This power is not restricted to just Peter and John, but is displayed through all the apostles. By performing healings, signs and wonders through the apostles, God authenticated the gospel as defined and declared by them. It was difficult to deny such miracles or their significance (see Acts 4:16, 22). God was indeed at work through His apostles. Those who proclaimed that Jesus Christ was alive were those who performed miracles in His name.

**Thirdly** there was great Grace. Luke also tells us that “great grace was on them all” (Acts 4:33). While “great power” seems to be restricted to the apostles, who performed many signs and wonders, “great grace” appears to be evident among all the saints. Notice that the verse begins with the word “for”, indicating that what follows is a further explanation of the statement that “great grace was on them all.” It now seems to me that Luke is informing us that God was showering His grace upon the Jerusalem church, at least in part due to the unity of the believers, as evidenced by their caring for one another in their financial needs.

**Fourthly** there was great Generosity. For various reasons these were not easy times for those living in Jerusalem, the result being that many of the saints in Jerusalem were in financial straits. It is not merely generosity which prompts those with financial resources to give, however; it is a deep unity among the saints.

**First**, let us note that this text does not describe communism as we know it. The communism of our day says, “What’s yours is mine.” The community of believers in Jerusalem said, “What’s mine is yours.” There is a world of difference between these two methods of sharing the wealth. Communism seizes property from those who have. Theoretically, it then distributes wealth

among the poor, but this seldom happens. Often those in control of the government end up with much of what they have taken from others. Christianity voluntarily gives property to relieve the needs of those who do not have. I understand that individuals retained possession of their property until a need arose, and then some would sell a particular possession at a time of need.

Second, this giving is not a matter of tithing. The saints were obligated to financially support those, like Peter, who ministered to them. Paul writes

*This is my defence to those who examine me. Do we not have the right to financial support? Do we not have the right to the company of a believing wife, like the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Or do only Barnabas and I lack the right not to work? Who ever serves in the army at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its fruit? Who tends a flock and does not consume its milk? (1 Corinthians 9:3-7)*

*Now the one who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with the one who teaches it (Galatians 6:6).*

Our text deals with giving that is above and beyond the normal giving of the saints.

Third, the giving here is for ministry to those who are in financial need. The religion of the day had all kinds of excuses for not helping the poor. In a time when piety was measured in terms of earthly prosperity, those who were poor were viewed as those under divine discipline (see John 9:1-2). Thus, to give to the suffering could be viewed as resisting God. The church looked on the needy as an opportunity to express their love and (in the case of needy Christians) their unity with fellow-believers.

**Great Unity leads to Great Power that leads to Great Grace that leads to Great Generosity**  
. This account is a pattern for the modern church to follow and implement.

**36 So Joseph**, a Levite who was a native of Cyprus, called by the apostles Barnabas (which is translated "son of encouragement"), **37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and placed it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:36-37).**

**I believe** there are several reasons why Luke included this specific information about Barnabas. In the first place, Barnabas is an excellent example of what Luke has just described. Barnabas had a piece of property which he sold, and then brought the proceeds to the apostles to distribute as they saw fit. This is the way it was supposed to be, the way Luke had just described it in more general terms.

Secondly, Barnabas provides an excellent backdrop against which the deception of Ananias and Sapphira will be contrasted. Barnabas was a man respected by the church. He was the source of encouragement to many. He saw a need and recognized he had the resources to help meet it.

Finally, this brief reference to Barnabas is Luke's way of introducing this great leader (and example) to us, in preparation for his later appearances in Acts. He will advocate for Paul to Peter, go with Paul on his first missionary journey and then stand up against Paul over John Mark's failure on the first missionary journey.

Now we come to the most confronting story of the early church's life. **We enter into the land of But**. This is a land filled with major problems that opens us up to lies and deception; doubt and unbelief. We all enter this land. I believe that God can heal but... I believe that my prayers will be answered but... We see the land of but when Jesus invited people to follow Him. But first let me bury the dead.. but let me first say good bye to the family.. Do you live in the land of But. It is the most dangerous land to live in for it will rob you of your relationship with God in Christ and your destiny.

**But a man named Ananias.** Ananias entered into the land of But which ended in disaster for him and his wife.

First, when the sin of Ananias is described in verses 1 and 2, as well as when Peter rebukes him in verses 3 and 4, Ananias is referred to in a singular form. When Peter questions and rebukes Sapphira in verses 8 and 9, he uses the plural, thus linking Sapphira with the sin of her husband. Luke's account in verses 1 and 2, along with Sapphira's testimony in verse 8, makes it clear that she was aware of and participated in his deception. We should also note that Ananias alone appeared before the apostles with the money he claimed to be the full amount of the sale. Sapphira appears three hours later. (I have to confess, my first thought was that she was

shopping!)

All of this inclines me to suspect that this deception was initiated by Ananias, and not by Sapphira. He is the instigator, but she – by her silence, and later by her false statement – was his accomplice, and thus she shared in his guilt and discipline. The way it worked out, Sapphira was given the opportunity to confess her role in this sin, and thus to distance herself from divine discipline. Unfortunately, she persisted in her sin.

Second, I would observe that the expressions “kept back” (verse 2) and “keep back” (verse 3) are the same verb. This verb is used only three times in the New Testament, the final time being in Titus 2:

Every time this term is used in the New Testament (and elsewhere, it would seem), it has a negative connotation. While Ananias was certainly free to keep some or all of the proceeds of the sale of their property, it was stealing once he claimed to give all.

Third, I would point out that Peter did not take the lives of Ananias and Sapphira, nor did he pronounce a death sentence upon Ananias. God took the lives of Ananias and Sapphira, not Peter. Peter rebuked Ananias for his sin, but he did not pronounce sentence on him. He left this matter to God. When God took the life of Ananias, it then became clear to Peter what Sapphira’s fate would be, unless she confessed. Sadly, she did not, and she died like her husband.

I would finally observe that there is no indication Ananias and Sapphira were unsaved. It would be easy to conclude that this couple had never come to faith, but Luke makes no such indication. Christians are fully capable of such sins.

**So what was the problem?** Ananias and Sapphira did not have to sell their property, nor did they need to give any of the proceeds of the sale to the church. They are not disciplined for “holding back” on God; they are disciplined for their hypocrisy – for lying to the church and to the Holy Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira sinned by trying to appear more pious than they were by lying about the amount of their gift.

The Gospels of the New Testament contain our Lord's strong words of rebuke for hypocrites. Somehow, hypocrisy is not taken as seriously by Christians today as it was by our Lord. Perhaps one reason is because all of us are guilty of this sin, and we'd rather focus on the sins of others.

But why was hypocrisy the first sin to be dealt with in the early church, and why were the consequences so severe for Ananias and Sapphira? I believe it is because hypocrisy is lying, and lying is contrary to the truth. Our Lord Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). The Spirit of God is the "Spirit of truth" (John 14:17; 16:13). It is He who "guides us into all the truth" (John 16:13). It is the truth that sets us free (John 8:32). We are sanctified by the truth (John 17:17). The church is the "support and bulwark of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Satan, on the other hand, is a liar, and the "father of lies" (John 8:44). The truth is foundational to everything that relates to the Christian faith. To tolerate lying (hypocrisy) is to undermine the church.

**It is relatively** easy to condemn the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira, but let us recognize that we are all hypocrites, and hypocrisy takes many forms. In our text, hypocrisy is seeking to appear more spiritual to others than you really are. One of the most popular excuses unbelievers employ to justify their rejection of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith is: "the church is full of hypocrites." In truth, it is. The marvel is that God saves hypocrites, just as He saves liars, murderers, and the very worst of mankind: The property was theirs and they could do anything that wanted to.

This form of lying to God and his church enables **Satan to enter in**. *Ananias, how is it that Satan has filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and kept some for yourself?*

**In the land of** But lives deception, lies and hypocrisy which give Satan the opportunity to do his deadly work. It was the sin of Ananias that enables Satan to enter in. Sin is the door that Satan enters and that is why Jesus' death and resurrection is so important. Jesus' work on the cross forgives sin and slams the door in Satan's face. But if we continue to sin, we keep the door open and guess who can enter in.

**The death of Ananias** and his wife had a profound impact on the church, as well as on those

outside the faith. We read in verse 5 that “great fear gripped all who heard” about the death of Ananias. After the death of Sapphira, we are again told that “great fear gripped the whole church and all who heard about these things”

With great power to save and heal comes fear and respect of that great power. God was and still is making a huge statement, drawing a line in the sand. Don't ly and deceive the Holy Spirit. Don't give Satan an opportunity to enter your life and corrupt you.

**God is holy and he** is a God that you need to fear and respect. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*

**You can't get** away with anything with God Amen.