

1. Resurrection Changes Our View of Ownership in This Life
  - a. Church's View of Ownership - not mine, but His, and to be shared with the Church
    - i. "Commonness" - mutual, communal, see Acts 2:44
    - ii. This is not *socialism* or *communism*, which are compelled by coercion and/or violence
      1. “I take what is yours and give it to whom I choose.”
    - iii. It is, rather, voluntary sharing *from a heart certain about resurrection*, without the external pressure of an authoritative force to do what one does not want to do.
    - iv. It is a transformation of *wants*, compelled and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, to walk in a manner consistent with the generosity of God because the glory of the resurrection, the New Creation, will far outweigh the loss of things here and now
  - b. The ‘great grace’ of God is the effective transformation of hearts into this mutuality and proclamation
    - i. There was a deep, genuine, and willing desire to meet the needs of one another
    - ii. The wealthy (those owning lands (plural) and houses (plural) were selling them and sharing the profit
      1. Note that people weren't making themselves homeless, but were selling the extraneous lands which they had held
      2. Note also that these lands were most likely family lands (not always) and the common Israelite's expectation of their divine inheritance
        - a. Thus, these Jews were showing that their hope was not in the land, but in the promises of Christ Jesus and the power of His resurrection
        - b. "If we give up lands and houses here, we know that we have an abundance of provision in the resurrection"
        - c. Luke 12:33; 16:9
  - c. "giving back" - they were 'repaying' by witnessing to the resurrection of Jesus
    - i. The word “giving” their testimony is actually word for “give back” or “repay”
    - ii. The 'revenge' or 'payback' of persecution is the preaching of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus
      1. The Church saw this grace as an appropriate *return* for persecution!
  - d. Joseph, a Cyprian, was one of the wealthy who sold a piece of land and gave the proceeds to help those in the Church
    - i. Joseph had a reputation of generosity/encouragement
      1. In fact, it was the apostles who gave him the name, "son of encouragement" or Barnabas
        - a. This is the first we hear of Barnabas, who would be a travelling companion of Paul on the first missionary journey from Antioch
        - b. This term, "encouragement" is the same word used of the Holy Spirit in John 14-16, "*paraclete*", the one who comes alongside for encouragement, strength, comfort, exhortation
    - ii. Joseph was a Levite, one who wasn't supposed to own land in Israel, whose tribe was told by God that their inheritance was to be near to God
      1. Barnabas would have been a very poignant example to Theophilus, to whom the letter was written, because he, too, was in a similar situation to Barnabas
    - iii. Barnabas also lays the donation "at the apostles' feet", indicating that he was giving up all rights to the profits from the property and submitting it to direction of the twelve apostles

1. There is the possibility that this act shows that Barnabas, the leading planter of the Gentile Church along with Paul, worked in mutuality and submission to the Twelve.
2. This is important because it shows the unity of the mission to Jews and the mission to Gentiles as the work of one Church, not two, with one gospel
- e. So what we see in the early Church is a community devoted to the central mission of Christ and to one another, rooted in the resurrection of Jesus and their impending share of it
  - i. This passage is, in reality, a "2nd Pentecost", or a reiteration of the reality of the Holy Spirit and His building of His church.
    1. Thus, it is the response of repentant faith empowered by the Holy Spirit resulting in the exaltation of Jesus through the proclamation of the gospel
    - ii. However, not all was kosher – for some among them were actually living a life of pretense – like whitewashed tombs
2. To Pretend to be Near to God for the Approval of Others is a Serious Offense to God
  - a. Ananias and Sapphira *appeared* to do what Barnabas did, but did it *pretentiously*
    - i. In fact, this deception is a work of Satan to undermine the Church's mission
    - ii. See Peter's comment, "Why has Satan *filled your heart* to lie...?"
      1. While the Church had been "filled with the Holy Spirit" to proclaim the gospel, here we see the opposite, that Satan had filled their hearts to lie.
      2. Satan's first tactic was to destroy the Church by the external force of persecution, but his immediate second is to destroy it from within by the force of deception and self-exaltation.
  - b. What is Pretense?
    - i. Pretense is the attitude that seeks to portray a version of oneself which is untrue, incomplete, and misleading out of a desire to make oneself appear worthy of honor
    - ii. Pretense begins with comparing righteousness and reputation with others as the means and evidence of one's greatness
      1. This is opposed to repentance, which compares itself to the holy God, and thus reveals one's great need and lack of greatness, and exalts God's mercy in JC
  - c. Pretense seeks to be honored for its goodness
    - i. To look good in the eyes of people
      1. Ananias wanted to be seen to be like Barnabas - to receive an epithet like "son of encouragement"
    - ii. Yet, pretense only cares about the appearance, not the substance
      1. Ananias didn't want to be encouraging like Barnabas - he only wanted to appear like it
    - iii. Pretense seeks to *appear close to God* and for Him when it is *actually far from him* and opposed to Him
  - d. Pretense believes that we can hide the truth *virtuously*
    - i. Herein lays an irony of humanity: We want to be known.
      1. We were created in the image of God to know and be known. This desire was not destroyed with the Fall. But, when we have rejected the knowledge of God then we made Him into our own image and our capacity for self-disclosure was dimmed by sin, guilt, shame.
    - ii. But not known *too much*.
      1. Social networking in the digital age:
        - a. Over 1.79 billion *active* (logged in within last 30 days) Facebook users, over 1/4 of the world's population

- i. People want to know and be known
    - b. Yet, aren't most of your photos and status updates placed to cast you in a positive light? Or, do you post *all* the stuff from your heart? The dark stuff, the hidden stuff?
      - i. We don't want to be *completely* known
    - c. We hide reality from ourselves (self-deception), from each other by filtering the information that we give each other
  - 2. We are afraid of being known because we base our acceptance on our own goodness
    - a. Yes, but the root of fear is actually self-righteousness. Self-righteous pride that thinks, "If that person sees how good I am, that is enough."
    - b. The problem that leads us to hide ourselves in fear is when we realize that we are NOT good enough, or beautiful enough, or wise enough, or strong enough. It is not that our fear here is irrational. It is very rational.
    - c. We *know* that we have failed to be good enough, so we try to hide. We are not what we ought to be so we hide. Just like our first parents hid from God, so we run away and cover ourselves, hoping that He will not be able to see.
  - 3. Ananias and Sapphira tried to hide the fact that they kept some of the monies back *because they wanted to appear as "encouraging" as Barnabas*
    - a. But they were not as generous as Barnabas, and that would have been OK, *but they lied to impress people*
- e. There are three ways that we suppress the truth about ourselves, i.e. hide:
  - i. We hide from ourselves; the evidence is our failure to face the facts about ourselves and make excuses or shift blame to others
    - 1. "I am somebody" because "I'm better than that person".
    - 2. Comparison as justification
  - ii. We hide from others; posturing and pretending, competing and comparing
    - 1. We can keep people at a distance emotionally and spiritually, away from the dark secrets that we bury within our souls that end up hardening us and twisting us until we cannot relate well to people at all. We can admit weaknesses that we *used* to have, but have overcome. But it is a rare person that can admit his present struggle, his present weakness, his present powerlessness. So, we hide it and through comparison and competition force people's eyes away from our own brokenness and onto others'.
  - iii. So, we have become masters of hiding from ourselves and from each other through various means and in numerous ways.
3. We Cannot Hide the Truth From God
  - a. We hide from God; ignoring or reimagining Him in our minds so that He doesn't confront or contradict us in any real or deeply meaningful way
    - i. Now, with God we know that we are weak and sinful, but rather than coming near to Him to rely upon His grace, we run from Him. The last thing we want to do is to deal with the lover who knows us truly and whom we cannot control or buy off in order to feel better about ourselves in our weakness and shame.
    - ii. You seek help from other gods and the means by which the world empowers (wealth/reputation/self-autonomy)

1. “Jesus, You are my reward”...but I’ll cheat on my taxes to get a bigger refund, lie to my friend so I don’t look like I made a mistake, and I’ll act just like a pagan, scrambling and scheming and leaning on pagan means to get what I want out of life.
  2. “Be Thou My Vision”...but my mind and money is spent on worthless luxuries & entertainment more than on thoughts of God
  3. “Jesus, You are our King”...but don’t ask me to give you control over every area of life
- b. But, who can hide from God? How do you hide from the One before whom “no creature is hidden from His sight, but we are all naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account?” (Heb 4:13)
- c. We commit the sin of Ananias and Sapphira
- i. They pretended to give everything to God, but they hid some part
    1. We proclaim to give the Lord everything, but we hide part of ourselves from Him
    2. This is the sin of pretense, of pretending to be honest with God when we are not *so that other people think more highly of us*
      - a. In so doing, we are showing what we really trust in: the approval of men, our own glory/reputation – we worship ourselves
  - b. This is how we “remake God into our own image”
    - i. Trying to alleviate our shame and sense of guilt, we reimage God into a functional God who cannot see our sin or chooses *not to see* our sin
    - ii. We do this in two primary ways:
      1. “He is *only* wrathful and angry, so I cannot run to Him.” We hide or run away from God in anxious despair or in arrogant rejection of Him
      2. “He is *only* loving and kind, so He *ignores* my sins.” So, we hide or run away from Him to pursue our pleasures, serving other lords to rule over us and rejecting Him as Lord over my life.
    - iii. However, both these views miss or ignore the Cross of Christ, where God is BOTH wrathful and loving
      1. At the cross we see God the most clearly as the Savior from our sins and as the LORD of our lives
      2. This truth leads us to humble boldness in our confident inadequacy, always running to Him with our weaknesses and sins, trusting in Him to accept us based upon the blood of Jesus and to transform us according to the Holy Spirit powerfully working within us
  - c. Ananias’ sin wasn’t greed or not giving enough.
  - d. The sin is the pretense! Pretending like one is close to God for the sake of the approval of men.
    - i. This is the OPPOSITE of repentance, which admits its weaknesses, its frailties, its struggles
    - ii. This is the OPPOSITE of faith, which is willing to be seen as absolutely dependent with no righteousness of my own to defend or pretend but only the righteousness of Christ as my sufficient security
    - iii. Peter says that it is not really lying to men, but to God!
4. Why Did God Kill These Two Pretentious Members of His Church?
- a. Remember, that God took away A & S life, it was not the Church
    - i. That is, this was not a ‘human error’ of arrogant Church leadership, nor does the Church ever retain the power to execute a person
    - ii. This was a judgment of God, Korah-style (Number 16)

1. Though Christ Jesus has brought us near to God in reconciliation, He is still the holy God, terrifying in His purity and power
- b. He still takes sin seriously, and the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, the sin of pretense, is the sin of pride which God hates and to which He is *opposed*
  - i. “I am opposed to the proud, but give grace to the humble.” (1 Pet 5:5)
  - ii. Humility is honest before the Lord because it trusts not in its own righteousness or worthiness
  - iii. Pride hides before the Lord because it seeks to defend its own righteousness and worthiness
- c. This lesson, that God is still holy and pride is indefensible in the light of the gospel, is a lesson that the Church had to learn and the world had to know: God is terrifying in His holiness
  - i. Fear of God’s holiness is better than no fear of God’s holiness
  - ii. **God used Ananias and Sapphira as an example, lest people come to Christ Jesus only as Healer, but not as Holy**
- d. Last of all, this whole story bothers us, right? Why?
  - i. God kills someone! It seems a bit of an overreaction.
    1. But that is only because we are so accustomed to the abundance of His mercy.
    2. Yet, God does not owe any of us mercy in any form.
  - ii. Remember that God’s mercies are so abundant that this fearful event shocks us, but it is rooted in the inviolable truth that God is holy and not to be taken for granted

God’s mercies are so abundant that we *presume* them. So, when He withdraws His mercy, even for just a moment, we are shocked and appalled, *because we actually believe that God owes us life!*

Yet, this does not show that God is harsh, but that He is so merciful that we take His great mercies for granted. Ananias and Sapphira were not the first pretentious people, nor the last, yet the overwhelming majority of arrogant pretentious “Christians” are not killed by the Holy Spirit.

These two are a severe warning that though God is merciful, He owes nobody a next breath, and pretense is something which God hates, even if he does not judge it immediately.

Let us not take His mercy for granted because it is abundant, but let us strive in all things to be pleasing to Him, knowing that it is His kindness that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4)

The reality is that we cannot hide, so the only way that we can approach God is on the basis of the atonement of Jesus Christ, who deals with our sins, our guilt, and our condemnation so that we no longer have to fear what God sees but can transparently admit it freely and without fear, not only before God but also before other people.