



**Message #12**  
**“THE UNSURRENDERED HAND”**  
**Acts 5:1-11**

Acts 5 contains some of the most remarkable and shocking narratives in all of the New Testament. In fact, our passage this week, Acts 5:1-11, the story of Ananias and Sapphira, has often confused scholars and ordinary Christians alike. Is it true that God killed a husband and wife simply for lying? Let's see what we can learn from this story.

Acts 4 concluded with the account of the early Christians selling what they had and giving it to the church to take care of any who might have need (4:32-37). An example is made of BARNABAS (the “son of encouragement”).

**BARNABAS the Encourager:**

We shall look more closely at this man in later chapters, but just to highlight that he was an encourager by nature and not just name, let's quickly see HOW he encouraged others.

- **He encouraged through finances (Acts 4:36-37)**  
By selling a property he owned and giving the proceeds to the apostles to distribute as needed within the church, Barnabas demonstrated that he was living for others under the control of God's spirit of love.
- **He encouraged through fellowship (Acts 11:19-29)**  
The church is growing rapidly and is in need of gifted assistance. Barnabas seeks out Saul of Tarsus (later to be called Paul) who was a bit of an outcast in the Christian community because of his pre-conversion persecution of the “followers of the Way”. Barnabas was not afraid to stick his neck out and to invite Saul into the fellowship.
- **He encouraged through fellowship (Acts 11 – 13)**  
He championed Saul into a position of prominence where his abilities and gifts could be used (Acts 11:22-26). This meant that Barnabas' own position was diminished....eg: in Acts 13:1 it is “Barnabas and Saul” and then, in Acts 14:2 it has become “Paul and Barnabas”. Barnabas was not afraid of encouraging by following.
- **He encouraged through failure (Acts 15:36-41)**  
Barnabas and Paul are debating/arguing over whether to take John Mark with them on the Second Missionary journey. John Mark had deserted them on the first Missionary Journey, and Paul was against taking him again. However, Barnabas was keen to give the young man a second chance. He was an encourager even in spite of the previous failure of John Mark.

**We are all called to “encourage one another” (1 Thess.5:11). How can you encourage others?**

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**Do you find it hard to encourage other people? Why?**

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**ANANIAS & SAPPHIRA**

Luke uses the example of Barnabas as the background to his telling the story of Ananias and Sapphira. This couple also sold some property and brought money to the apostles to be used in the church, but there was, apparently, a big difference in the two cases.

**Read Acts 5:1-11**

## What did Ananias and Sapphira do that was not consistent with Christian community (5:1-2)?

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**Pretend you are watching the interaction between Peter and Ananias and Sapphira (5:3-9). How would you report this incident?**

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Ananias and Sapphira did not have to bring **any** of the proceeds of the property sale to be used in the church (Acts 5:3-4). And, if he chose to only bring some of the proceeds, that would not have been a problem, either. The sin was one of deceit...bringing less than they had made out they were bringing. Peter affirms that Ananias has every right to decide what is wisest to do with his money. Ananias' problem is that he and his wife have lied about the fact they are keeping some of the money for themselves.

We don't know why they decided to lie and deceive. There are many possible reasons for this. But this passage reminds us just of how serious the sins of lying and deceit are, particularly when it comes to our faith. The apostle Peter even asked why Satan had filled Ananias' heart (5:3) and condemned him for lying, not to men, but "to God" (5:4).

### **Truth Matters.**

We see two important things from this little story...

1. Christians must be people of truth. Jesus taught that Satan "is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). When we speak falsehoods and half-truths we do not reflect the glory of the One who is "the Truth" (John 14:6), we instead reflect the image of Satan.
2. Christians must never value money, personal reputation, or anything else above the holiness that we are called to live by. The gravity of this is highlighted by R.C. Sproul in....

*When we understand the character of God, when we grasp something of His holiness, then we begin to understand the radical character of our sin and hopelessness. Helpless sinners can survive only by grace. Our strength is futile in itself; we are spiritually impotent without the assistance of a merciful God. We may dislike giving our attention to God's wrath and justice, but until we incline ourselves to these aspects of God's nature, we will never appreciate what has been wrought for us by grace. (The Holiness of God...p.183)*

### **The Consequences.**

Luke goes on to describe the aftermath of this deception in Acts 5:5-11.

Both Ananias and Sapphira suffered untimely and sudden deaths.

Whether the deaths of this couple were God's direct judgement and punishment, or whether it was more a case of sudden heart failure in the shock of their conspiracy to deceive being found out, we cannot tell for sure. Much scholarly debate has taken place over this very point.

However, despite the lack of some answers to our questions here, there are still some important lessons for us to learn.

**How does this story demonstrate the high value that God places on truth and unity in the church?**

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**Is there something you're holding on to, or some area of your life, that is unsundered to Christ?**

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**What forms might compromise & hypocrisy take in your own life?**

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**Acts 5:11 says that "great fear seized the whole church". How would you have responded to this?**

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**FOOTNOTE:** Acts 5:11 sees the first use of the word "church" (ekklesia) in Acts. It appears 23 times in Acts as we see the church grow, develop, organize and reach out.