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THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF THE ACTS
NUMBER 18
ACTS 5:6-16

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In the Book of Joshua, we have the story of a man called Achan. 1 Chronicles 2:7 calls Achan "A perpetual trouble maker". Achan lived in the generation of Jews who crossed the Jordan and entered Canaan to conquer it. In a group as large as that, you will always find some trouble makers. We have them today. Romans 16:17-18 warns us to avoid trouble makers. This passage says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them". Notice this is written to believers. If we find a believer who gossips, maligns other people, and causes trouble, we should separate ourselves from them and isolate them. Achān caused trouble and God had to isolate him.

The city of Jericho, the first city they were to conquer after entering the land, was placed under the ban. (The doctrine of the ban is stated in Leviticus 27:26-29. It simply means that it was not redeemable and that no man was to take anything of the loot that was captured, but everything belonged to the Lord and was to be used in his service.) Now Achan violated this ban by taking a beautiful sword, some gold, and a beautiful sport coat. Because of his theft and lying about it, God allowed their army to lose the battle of the city of Ai. Achan was discovered as the culprit and was put to death for his crime. Now in this story in the 5th Chapter of Acts, the story of Ananias and Sapphira, we have exactly the same sin, the sin unto death. The only difference is that in this story of Ananias and Sapphira, the Lord himself administered the penalty. This is why we call Ananias and Sapphira the ghost of Achan.

This Is The Principle Stated Here

The young Jerusalem church had to be strong in order to stand against such terrible pressure from without, and they had to be protected against lying and deceit, Ananias and Sapphira could have ruined this Jerusalem church if they had gotten by with their terrible sin. They were suffering from approbation lust, and in order to get praise they were willing to lie to God and to the Holy Spirit and to their fellow church members. They said they gave all when they only gave part. Now it was no one's business how much they gave until they tried to pretend that they had duplicated the gift of Barnabas and had given the total amount they had received from the sale of their property. Barnabas, evidently a very wealthy man from the Isle of Cyprus, had given a very generous gift to the Jerusalem church. Because of this Ananias and Sapphira were moved with envy. They desired to be No. 1 and they just couldn't stand it when Barnabas pushed them out of their spot of popularity. You see, they banked part of the price of the property they had sold and brought the remainder and gave it to the church, but they told the church they had given the complete amount they received from the sale.

It was a sin inside the church, committed by two believers. It was a sin of omission. They gave, but didn't give all, as they pretended they did. In pretending to give all when they only gave part, they violated every principle of the Christian life. They were jealous for popularity and wanted to be No. 1 in the church. Now remember, it is not wrong to give part. The Lord does not expect you to give all you have. What you give is nobody's business and is between you and the Lord. But when you give part and then pretend that you have given all in order to get praise and approval from the church, that is a gross sin. That is not giving as unto the Lord. This always brings discipline from God.

In verse three we read that Satan had filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit. In this connection, let us review the teaching of the Bible concerning sins against the Holy Spirit.

1. Resisting the Holy Spirit
This sin can only be committed by an unbeliever.
ACTS 7:51 "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."
2. Blaspheming The Holy Spirit
This sin can only be committed by an unbeliever.
MATTHEW 12:31 "Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men." *subject*
3. Grieving The Holy Spirit
This sin is committed by believers and refers to sins that spring from the the old sin nature.
EPHESIANS 4:30 "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."
4. Quenching The Holy Spirit
This sin is committed by believers and refers to the dependence of the believer on his own good works.
1 THESSALONIANS 5:19 "Quench not the Spirit:"
5. Lying To The Holy Spirit
This is the sin of our passage here. It is the sin of false-motivation. It is the sin of doing good things in order to receive approbation from man. The Christian must be controlled by the Holy Spirit and not by the old sin nature.

Ananias and Sapphira were church members, were believers. God had allotted them a certain amount of time to live. We are going to see how their time was cut short, how by an act of their lying and misrepresentation, God cut their time short and took their lives.

There are three reasons why Christians die

1. Their work is finished.
2. They die to glorify God in some special way. (Like Bill Wallace of China)
3. They die because God removes them with the sin unto death.

So you see from our story, Ananias and Sapphira died long before their time, those many years just went down the drain because they refused to orientate themselves to the plan of God for their lives.

The sin unto death isn't any particular sin, but some series of sins which makes the Christian a serious menace to society, just like a mad dog is dangerous to society. We saw this principle illustrated in the life of King Saul as related in 1 Chron. 10:13 His gross sin caused him to die before his time. Sometimes the Lord just has to take a man out of the way to save a situation. David was under the sin unto death, but before the sin fell upon him, David confessed and Nathan said to him, "Don't worry, you are not going to die". The believer in 1 Cor. 5 was under the sin unto death but when he confessed, got right with God, the sin was removed.

Ananias and Sapphira present a little different case than all others who received the death penalty from God. God removed them so this malady would not spread in the young church. This is a great warning message in the Word of God to us. It is a sharp warning that one of the greatest dangers in the Christian life is approbation lust. I would rather see the doors of the church closed than to see people doing things for praise and glory and approval. Everything we do is as unto the Lord. Don't do things in this church in order to get praise from men. Don't do anything in an attempt to get recognition. The old sin nature inside of all of us tries to make us serve and do things in order to get praise and recognition from others. Please notice that though Peter was a high official of the church, he didn't pronounce the death penalty. God did this himself.

ACTS 5:6 "And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him." It says, "Wound him up". He was not a clock, but this is the thundering diction of the King James version and it means they wrapped his body for burial. The original language says they wrapped him in swaddling clothes. This is to stop a run on approbation lust.

ACTS 5:7 "And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in." Three hours had gone by. Sapphira had been very busy, probably banking the other part of the money and buying her new outfit she would wear when she made her grand entrance to the church. She just knew because of their great gift the whole church would fall at her feet and they would be pawing all over her, telling her how great she and Ananias were and how simply magnificent was the wonderful sacrificial gift they had made. Possibly she banked the money in five minutes and spent the other two hours and fifty-five minutes picking out the new outfit. Of course, she wouldn't want it to be too ostentatious for such a sacrificial occasion. She wanted to look good but not gawdy. She was ready for the church to fall all over her with praise, but instead of the church falling at her feet she fell at their feet dead. Picture her standing there, ready for the approval of the church, ready to get back into the limelight which had been robbed from her and her husband when Barnabas came forward with his very generous gift.

ACTS 5:8 "And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much." Simon Peter asked her this question to see if she was involved in the same kind of sin which had taken her husband's life.

ACTS 5:9 "Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out." Peter found out she was guilty also, and he pronounced the doom which the Lord had already pronounced upon her husband and on her.

ACTS 5:10 "Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband." She expired and was buried beside her husband.

An Application

If you get offended because someone doesn't write you a letter or praise you for something you have done around the church, then this is for you. Don't do things so someone will pat you on the back and tell you how great you are. There are lots of jobs around the church where people don't get much recognition and praise. Just remember, do everything as unto the Lord. Ananias and Sapphira refused to do their work as unto the Lord, so he just removed them.

The Reaction In The Church

ACTS 5:11 "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." The objective of a local church is not to frighten people. Here, let us get four points on fear.

1. Discipline is necessary for the functioning of any organization. The church is an organization and to maintain it, you must have discipline.
2. This fear produced the discipline necessary to carry the Jerusalem church through the early days of their growth and development. It brought respect for authority in the church. They came to have greater respect for the leaders of the church than they had ever had before.
3. This fear induced the realization that to fail to live by grace removed the individual Christian from an opportunity to serve the Lord.
4. This fear included the awareness of mental attitude sins plus the clarification of the individual Christian's motivation to observe God's commands.

The whole church was brought to focus on discipline and they saw its absolute necessity.

Power In The Church As A Result of Discipline

ACTS 5:12 "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch." Many signs and wonders kept on occurring and thereby the unreached multitudes were forced to listen.

ACTS 5:13 "And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them." People came to have great respect for the church and unbelievers didn't try to run over them or ignore them. This is the attitude every community should have toward the church. They should say, "It really means something to belong to that church".

ACTS 5:14 "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) There was tremendous production because of this discipline. A great harvest of souls.

ACTS 5:15 "Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them." Here is an illustration of how unbelievers who didn't know better, even the superstitious were trying to pass under the shadow of Simon Peter and be healed. The Scripture doesn't say all these were healed.

This is the unbeliever who just wanted Simon Peter's shadow to fall on him and bring him some good luck.

1. It was based on the false idea that the shadow of a good man falling on you would bring good luck.
2. God does not honor superstition, but faith in the Word of God.
3. Superstitious faith always leads to superstitious practices.
4. This passage doesn't say these superstitious people were healed, but the silence of the Bible at this point illustrates the truth of Jeremiah 17:5-6 "Cursed is the man who puts his trust in man."
5. What is recorded here does illustrate the impact this discipline of Ananias and Sapphira had on the whole city.

ACTS 5:16 "There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one." Many were healed. There was real power in the church.