

INTEGRITY, ACTS 5:1-11

The Church You've Always Longed For #5

◆ **Intro:** Midterm elections have finally taken place. Imagine for a moment: 1) Your candidate running for office make promises to cut taxes, increase welfare, stop all crime, preserve the life of the unborn, etc. But once elected if that person changes his/her tune, you become hugely frustrated and justifiably disappointed. That person didn't have integrity. 2) Imagine a road across the bridge was newly paved, but the steel beams were old and rusted. When the bridge collapses it crushes several commuters. The bridge had not been inspected for integrity. 3) Picture this: There's a subtle little move that sometimes takes place in churches of any denomination. It's a technique performed during the offering in which you pretend to search your pockets for money (even though you don't intend to put any money in the plate.) This keeps you from looking like a total cheapskate when you pass the offering plate without putting anything in it. Instead of a "offering" it's called a "bluffering". It lacks integrity. In our text for today Ananias and his wife Sapphira tried to give a "bluffering" and it didn't end well. As you can tell from the story in Acts 5, the lack of integrity is dangerous. Lets explore.

◆ **1. What is integrity?** In Acts 4-5 Luke gives us 2 examples. One of integrity (Barnabus) and one lacking integrity (Ananias and Sapphira).

◆ **A. Integrity is a state in which something or someone is marked by consistent quality through and through.** Some folks say a sign of having integrity is doing the right thing in secret, when you are

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alone and nobody will know. (Are there things you would only do if no one could find out?) Barnabus was a man of integrity. In chapter 11 we read that "he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, and strong in faith." We also know that he was the one who went, found the Apostle Paul, and brought him back to help the church in Antioch. It was a big deal! Bigger than Woodstock. Bigger than an election. Barnabus and Paul taught for a whole year and drew big crowds! The end of chapter 4 tells us that Barnabus (Name means Son of Encouragement. Real name was Joe. But everyone called him by his nick name Barny, "encourager".) -chapter 4 tells us that Barny actually sold a section of land and gave it to the church to help other people. Wow! For real! But that's when Ananias and Sapphira enter the story. They copy Barnabus but don't give what they sold it for.

◆ Now, was it wrong for them to keep some of their own money? No (v4). Their problem wasn't that they didn't want to give the purchase price away. There was no requirement for them to be generous, or give it at all. It was that they wanted to look like it and not be it. They want to look like good, encouraging, church-leader, generous types too. But they don't want to have to actually BE that way.

◆ Now you might ask, "If a mob boss is consistently ruthless and openly cruel does that mean he has integrity since he is exactly what he claims to be? No. *With true integrity we're*

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talking about consistent uprightness. Corrie Ten Boom once said, "Don't worry about what you do not understand of the Bible. Worry about what you do understand but do not live by."

◆B. Lets also remember that Integrity is not perfection.

Barnabus was not perfect. At one point he got sucked up by peer pressure to start requiring jewish law-keeping for new Christians. That's when Paul called the Christians in Jerusalem on the carpet and told them to their face that they knew better than that (Gal. 2:16)! It's a surprise I know! Paul wrote "even Barnabus..." slipped into this. Barn! Good ol' trustworthy Barn! As another example, take King David, the man after God's own heart, the brave boy giant killer, the Psalm writer! David wasn't perfect either. 1Chronicles 21 tells us he actually "listened to Satan" just like Ananias and Sapphira are said to have done in our text (v3)!

◆That brings up a question. Can Christian people side with Satan? Could Ananias have been a true believer? Did Sapphira go to hell? We might ask the same thing of David while we're at it. Was David lost for eternity because he sinned and sided with the devil? Listen. Christian people do not become instantly sinless when they trust Jesus as the payment for their sins. They become instantly forgiven and set on the road to God's final gift of perfection. Christian people can give place to Satan in their lives. Paul says in Ephesians 4, speaking to the Christians there, that they

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should not give the devil a foothold. You and I can do that. But don't believe that all hope is lost. But Christian people do not lose their salvation because on ongoing failure. This is why we rejoice in the salvation Christ earned for us! Salvation is not by perfection but by faith in Christ alone!

◆ Good news is that God has never required perfection for he knows that is beyond us. Still God does want integrity and commands against all sin. And we all innately seem to want it in a church too.

◆ **C.** Why is it that people long for integrity in a Church? Why is it that when a preacher fails and is caught in horrible sin it causes repercussions not caused by a car-salesman when he's found to have gone afoul? Why does the media wink at an atheist politician who is caught with a prostitute, but if a Christian is, the fire burns hotter? Isn't it simply because Christians claim the stand for what's good and right, while the irreligious man does not? So the lack of integrity is more glaring when you affirm it and yet fail. Integrity is practicing the good you preach. That is a high call for followers of Jesus. God is all about truth, honesty, goodness, and purity. Jesus followers know that sin is what keeps us from life. Christian people proclaim that Jesus is the solution to our sin problem and that we want the solution. That makes sin our enemy, so what we model may have more impact perhaps than what we say! Lack of integrity can get away from you!

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◆ Billy Martin tells in his autobiography about a hunting trip to Texas with Mickey Mantle. Micky had a friend who would let them hunt on his ranch. Micky's friend gave them permission but asked Micky to do him a favor. He had a pet mule that was going blind and he didn't have the heart to put him out of his misery. Would Micky shoot it for him? Well, when Micky got back to the car where Billy was he pretended to be angry. He said his friend wouldn't let them hunt and that he was so mad he was going to go shoot one of his mules! He drove madly to the barn all the while Billy protested "We can't do that!"

◆ "Just watch me," Micky shouted. He jumped from the car with his rifle, ran in the barn and shot the mule. That's when he heard two more shots. He ran back to the car to find Billy with his rifle.

◆ "What are you doing?" Micky Mantle yelled.

◆ With an angry face, Billy yelled back, "We'll show that son of a gun! I just killed two of his cows!"

◆ It's not hard to see that the lack of integrity is dangerous.

◆ **D.** One additional question about Ananias and Sapphira we haven't finished. Some times folks wonder why the severity of punishment, when others get away with so much more evil. I mean being struck dead on the spot is a pretty big deal! It happened at other times in the history of God's people as well, always at important junctures where the community of God was

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learning what it meant to be that community in the world. In Leviticus 10 Aarons sons (Aaron was the newly formed Israel's very first priest) Nadab and Abihu behaved sinfully in the holy place and "fire came out from the Lord" and killed them. In 2Samuel 6 the holy Ark of the Lord was being carted back to Israel's land after having been stolen, and Uzzah the priest went to steady it when the cart tipped and God struck him dead. It seems shocking to us, but the people of Israel knew that you were never to put the Ark on a cart. That's like telling God to take the back seat of the buss. No The Ark never moved unless carried by the priests. In each of these cases God is showing his followers that being part of his church is serious business. It's no fad. It's no game you play. And sin doesn't become good for you just because you have been forgiven by God's grace.

◆v13 People were kept from joining the church for frivolous reasons. And yet more and more people became followers of Jesus! The integrity of God himself, his trustworthy goodness is what we all really long for.

◆2. What shall we do about being a church of integrity?

◆A. Start with yourself. Do you think there are flaws in your church? You make up part of that church. You are the one you can do the most about. If you can't see where you might be off God's path, just go to him in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to show you. Make confession a regular part of your praying. Many

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Christians over look this as though it is a negative. In reality scripture teaches that cleansing comes through confession.

◆B. Recommit yourself to honesty. Is there something in you life that you are hiding, or prefer to keep secret? It very well may be chipping away at your spirit. Hasn't it been long enough? When will you actually break down and put a filter on the computer? When are you going to go to a christian friend and ask for accountability? Bringing things into the light tends to kill off mold and mildew. Are you cutting financial corners, cheating others? Stop. Go make it right? Get another pair of eyes on the books to help keep you honest. There's no shame in that. There's not a single person with the individual power to avoid all sin. But we are better together. How much more confident in our senators and congressmen wouldn't we be if the offender simply stood up and said, "Yes, I did that. I'm sorry. I know it was wrong. I ask for your forgiveness."

◆To help grow your honesty make a habit of reading God's will in God's word. The word has power people. Read it.

◆*"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no*

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longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:22-32, NIV.

◆ C. Take out the garbage. That’s Action Step Five in our 50 Day Spiritual Adventure. Taking out our own garbage requires evaluations of our lives. Often we just watch whatever show we feel like and never wonder if our standards aren’t opening us to Satan’s influence or not. Everyone else is, so we do too. Listen folks, God’s word is clear: sin always leads to death of some kind. For Ananias and Sapphira it was immediate physical death. For some it’s death of a marriage. For others it’s death of a friendship, or a business, or a ministry, or the death of your credibility before others. But lets each of us mark it well. Sin brings death. Integrity brings life. We might not get caught immediately, but it remains a spiritual equation.

◆ So evaluate your books. Your movies. Your gaming. Your music. Do you have something that dishonors the ways of Christ? Throw them away. Get them out of the house, or off

◆ your computer.

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◆**Conclusion:** We were not saved in order to get away with sin.

We were saved to get away from sin! Pray Ps. 86:11!

◆Why is this a good thing for a church? Why do people long for a clean place and a clean heart? Why not happily go on sinning and being forgiven? Why is God against sin? Why did Jesus come to our world to overcome human sin? I'll tell you. Sin always makes your life unstable. When we don't know truth, and where we don't know who or what we can trust, we live in anxiety, worry, fear, hopelessness. It's like you feel during an earthquake. And it's a creepy existence: the surest thing you know (the ground), is unsure. It's like hunting in the woods on dry crunchy leaves. It's like crossing a rope bridge that's hanging on by a thread. It's like not knowing who to vote for because you don't know who will keep their word. Wouldn't you rather have a solid steel bridge? Wouldn't you rather have a soft dry hunting path? Wouldn't you rather know the ground your on won't cave in at any moment. You must tell yourself when you hear the Holy Spirit in your conscience telling you this is a path you ought not be on... we should tell ourselves "This will not end well. This will not fill me with deep hope. This will not honor my God and master." Ask for forgiveness and turn away. His way is better because His love is the perfect picture of integrity. Hebrews 4 tells us he went through every temptation you and I do, yet without sin. This is also why we know we can trust our savior, he was full of integrity.

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Worship and imitate him and the church will become all we have longed for.