

The Anatomy of a Church (10a)

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[Acts 20:28](#)

(Continuation from 02/09/14)

PERSONAL HOLINESS

The beauty of the sacrificial, selfless giving of the early church was marred by the ugly sins of deceit and self-glory. The story of Ananias and Sapphira is to Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. Both incidents interrupted the victorious progress of the people of God. The drama unfolds in four scenes: sinful pretense, spiritual perception, swift punishment, and solemn purging.

Spiritual Pretense

[Acts 5:1-2 \(NASB\)](#)

¹“**But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,**
² **and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet.**”

But introduces a sharp contrast between the actions of Barnabas and those of **Ananias** and **his wife Sapphira**. They, too, **sold a piece of property**. Unlike Barnabas, however, Ananias **kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge**. They saw an opportunity to make a double profit: They would gain spiritual prestige and still make some money on the side. Withholding part of the money for their own use was not a sin, as Peter clearly states in [verse 4](#).

[Acts 5:4 \(NASB\)](#)

⁴“**While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.**”

Nowhere were the believers commanded to give everything. Their giving, like all New Testament giving, was voluntary (cf. [2 Corinthians 9:7](#)).

[2 Corinthians 9:7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷“**Each one *must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.***”

The overt sin was lying, by publicly pretending to have given all the proceeds of the sale of their property. That sin was but the outward manifestation, however. The deeper, more devastating sin was hypocrisy based on a desire for spiritual status. They desired the approval of men for their sacrificial act and to be thought of as members of those most spiritually noble. No sin drew a sharper rebuke from our Lord than hypocrisy. In the Sermon on the Mount He warned His disciples:

Matthew 6:1-6 (NASB)

- ¹ "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.
- ² "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.
- ³ "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,
- ⁴ so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.
- ⁵ "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.
- ⁶ "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

Matthew 6:16-18 (NASB)

- ¹⁶ "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites *do*, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.
- ¹⁷ "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face
- ¹⁸ so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

He repeatedly denounced the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees ([Matthew 15:7](#); [Matthew 22:18](#); [Matthew 23:13-36](#)) and warned His disciples against its influence ([Luke 12:1](#)).

Luke 12:1 (NASB)

- ¹ "Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

He also warned that hell would be populated by hypocrites ([Matthew 24:51](#)).

Matthew 25:41 (NASB)

- ⁴¹ "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.'"