

The Back Alley of the Bible: Making Sense of Ananias and Sapphira (Part 2)

Introduction

The Text

³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

¹ But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." ⁹ But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

¹² Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³ None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵ so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. (Acts 4:32–5:16)

Returning to the Tour

A. This is now our second week with this text. I said last time that, it seems to me, this story of Ananias and Sapphira, as infamous as it is, it's like the back alley of the Bible.

1. You're walking through the Scriptures, as it were, and then you come to this story here, and, as you peer in, you can see it's a bit dark and scary. You don't want to linger too long out in

front of it. And you certainly don't want to go for a stroll down through it. You're going to get jumped. You know stuff's lurking in the shadows. It's not going to be fun.

- B. So people want to pass by this text just as quickly as they come to it. It seems frightening.
 - 1. God just straight kills some people for their sin on the spot.
 - 2. And, if I could just say it, on one read, Peter almost seems a bit psychotic, doesn't he? He's just sitting back in his chair, condemning these folks to death, emotionally unmoved and unfeeling about it all. He's like a mob boss or something, with his little minions coming in to collect the corpses and dispose of the evidence, or whatever.
 - a. It seems confusing, it seems troubling, it seems contrary to what we think we know of God in the Scriptures, especially in the NT. He's kind and forgiving and patient and longsuffering . . . isn't he?
- C. So we don't know what to do with it. And we don't particularly want to spend much time with it.
 - 1. So naturally I thought, let's give it, not just one week, but two.
 - 2. So as I've said, I wanted to take you on a tour down this back alley. And I've had three stops for us along the way. Regarding the sin and offence of Ananias and Sapphira, I wanted to consider with you: (1) The Presence of It; (2) The Essence of It; and (3) The Result of it.
 - a. We took the first two last time, which leaves the third stop for this morning.

What Was the Problem Again?

- A. But before we get into this let me at least remind you what I said the basic problem was here last time. I said there were three layers to this offence:
 - 1. First they "kept back" for themselves (v. 2), which we saw involved this idea of stealing from God.
 - 2. Second, they weren't just stealing from God, they were lying to him. "[You are lying] to the Holy Spirit . . ." (v. 3). "You have not lied to man but to God" (v. 4).
 - a. They want to look like Barnabas. They want to seem better than they truly are. They want to get the praise of the church and still keep the things of the world. So they give some but not all, but they claim they've given all. They lie.
 - i. There is lodged deep in their hearts what J.I. Packer calls a "mercenary motive."
 - (1) They give, but they give to get.
 - (2) It's not generosity that flows from a life transformed by the gospel and grace of God, as it was for Barnabas.
 - (3) It's self-centeredness masquerading as generosity craving the notice and admiration of man, without honest concern for God.

3. And this sets up the third layer, because they are stealing from God and lying to him, they were, at the bottom, in the most grievous way, testing him. So Peter says to Sapphira in [v. 9](#): “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?”
 - a. They’re trying to see just how much they can get away with. Does God really see? Does God really know? Will God really do anything about it? As I said last time, they’re playing a game of chicken with the almighty.
 - i. And they’re going to lose. Because he does see, and he does know, and he’s about to do something about it . . .

B. So here now we come to consider The Result of It.

1. And I see three results that spin out from all this: (1) Immediate Death; (2) Great Fear; and (3) Exponential Growth. You can see how, by the end, things take a surprising twist and turn in grace, but in the beginning it’s tough.

Result #1: Immediate Death

A. The first result (we can’t help but notice!) is that Ananias and Sapphira drop down dead at once.

1. So we read in [v. 5](#): “When Ananias heard these words [from Peter], he fell down and breathed his last.”
2. And then similarly in [v. 10](#), regarding Sapphira now, we read: “Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last.”

B. So there is sin, deceit, a testing of the Lord; and there is a swift and stunning response: immediate death.

Three Accents

A. Now, it seems to me, this swift and stunning response from God is meant to accent for us at least three things in particular . . .

Accent #1: The Holiness of God

A. First, it accents the holiness of God. God is holy. He is set apart. He is other than us. He is pure and spotless and bright in his glory.

1. And as such, he is also just, and he cannot look upon sin with favor (cf. [Hab. 1:13](#)).

B. Oftentimes, it seems to me, we get this disjointed view of God. We think that God’s holiness, and the wrath against sin that often comes along with it, is something primarily emphasized in the OT. We read the stories, we see it . . .

1. So Adam and Eve eat from the wrong tree and he kicks them out of the garden.
2. Then there’s sin in Noah’s day so he’s going to flood the whole earth in judgement.

3. And then later, with Israel, even when he wants to bring a people to himself, he still can't let them get too close lest he break out against them and kill them. So they're all trembling before Mt. Sinai and only Moses can go all the way up.
 4. And then later, with Korah's rebellion, when the people are grumbling about why Moses gets this special access to God over others, God opens the ground right up and swallows those people whole, and they drop straight down to Sheol alive (cf. [Num. 16](#)).
 5. This is why, when Isaiah is given that vision of God on his throne in heaven in [Isa. 6](#), what are all the angels around that throne saying as they cover their faces, from fear it would seem: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD" (v. 3).
 - a. So we get it from the OT. God is holy. We are not.
- C. But, at least superficially, at first glance, don't we start to feel like things really shift in the NT? Like all of a sudden God's demeanor changes in Jesus.
1. Maybe before he was a little grumpy, he just kept waking up on the wrong side of the bed.
 2. And then, you know, he's mellowed out in his old age. And so now he's more kind and patient and he's not putting people to death, he's giving life. And Jesus is there healing and restoring and holding babies and petting sheep.
- D. But, listen, if that's how you've seen it to this point, I've got news for you: God is "the same yesterday and today and forever" ([Heb. 13:8](#)). The God of the OT is the very same God of the NT. He is still just as holy now as he has always been. Which is why, by the way, we should not be surprised when we see people still being judged for their sin in the NT . . .
1. It happens here in [Acts 5](#) with Ananias and Sapphira.
 2. Later, in [Acts 12](#), when Herod is preparing to give a speech and the people are trying to butter him up, shouting: "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" (v. 22)—we're told in the very next verse that "[i]mmmediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last" (v. 23). And the narrative just moves right along, as if this wasn't really any big deal, as if "of course he was struck down and eaten by worms; God still does these things . . . God's still holy . . . and you don't mess with him!"
 3. In [Acts 13](#), when Paul and Barnabas are on the island of Cyprus, a man gets in the way of their ministry, seeking to lead people astray and Paul straight puts some sort of Holy Spirit hex on the guy and he's struck blind ([vv. 4-12](#)).
 4. And of course the book of Revelation shows us that all these little personal, local, temporal expressions of God's judgement to this point—both in the Old and New Testaments—it's all headed towards the ultimate judgment, the final judgment: where it's not merely for this or that person . . . all will give an account; and it's not happening merely in this or that place . . . it's cosmic in its scope; and its effects are not merely for some limited time . . . it's eternal, and we go to heaven or hell on the basis of it, forever!
- E. So if you thought God's trembling holiness was really only a significant feature of the OT, you've not yet closely read the NT. His holiness isn't muted as we turn towards Jesus. If anything it's made more clear.

1. This is why, again, now in the book of Revelation, when John is given a vision of God on his throne in heaven, he hears that same declaration from the living creatures that are situated there round about him: “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord (Rev. 4:8).
 - a. It’s a clear link back to [Isa. 6:3](#) and it sends a clear message to us here now: again, God is “the same yesterday and today and forever” ([Heb. 13:8](#)). And make no mistake: he is holy.

- F. Just to put one final emphasis on this point: this is why Paul, when he’s looking back at those who fell under God’s judgment in the OT, particularly with Israel in the wilderness . . .
 1. He doesn’t say: “Thank goodness that was the OT and now we have something different. God would never do such things to us.”
 2. No. Quite the opposite. Instead, he writes: “⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.’⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents,¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:6-12).
 - a. He doesn’t say such things are irrelevant for us.
 - b. He says it’s all an example for us. It’s a warning for us.

- G. And so it is with this story of Ananias and Sapphira as well.
 1. You can’t just walk into God’s presence as they do here, with all this hidden sin and deceit, and think you’ll surely live to tell about it.
 - a. You very well might not.
 - b. And even if you get away with it today, there’s no telling what will come for you tomorrow.
 - c. And, even if you manage to keep it under wraps until you’re dying day, you certainly will have to answer for it on the last day.
 - i. For as the author of Hebrews puts it: “[N]o creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must [and we will!] give account” ([Heb. 4:13](#)). He knows. He sees. And he is holy.

Accent #2: The Wretchedness of Sin

- A. Of course, the immediate death of Ananias and Sapphira in [Acts 5](#) also accents the wretchedness of sin, doesn’t it?
 1. Maybe you were tempted, as I was, to look at God’s reaction to their sin and think: “Well, c’mon God, that was a bit of an overreaction, don’t you think?” It kind of feels like God blew

his top and maybe he had to circle back around later and say sorry (as it happens with me sometimes with my kids).

2. But that's not what this is.
 - a. My reaction to this story at this point, then, actually says more about me than it does about God.
 - i. It says I don't get how holy he really is.
 - ii. And I don't get how wretched my sin really is.

B. It's the nature of sin to blind its host to itself, do you understand?

1. So, in other words, ironically, often you are at your worst spiritually when you think you are at your best.
2. When sin is in its most potent form, you will be least aware of its presence.
3. You are most in need of grace when you think you have no need of it.
4. It's as if sin comes with a numbing agent. You don't even notice it while it's killing you.

C. This is why, by the way, sin is always clearer when it's in someone else. Have you noticed that?

1. You have that coworker or family member—oh how obnoxious they are! You see their pride, or their jealousy, or their materialism, or whatever it may be. But they have no idea.
 - a. They're always blaming something else, the problem is out there somewhere.
 - b. And you're sitting there listening thinking: "It's you, you're the problem! It's not your boss. Your boss is mad at you because you're acting like an entitled brat. It's not that guy or gal, they broke up with you because . . . look at you!" You see it clearly. They don't see it at all.

2. But you know what? Here's the kicker. They can do the same sort of thing for you!

D. This is Jesus' whole issue with the Pharisees and religious leaders in Israel.

1. So he says to them: "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains" (John 9:41). Don't you get it? You're on your way to becoming truly righteous when you see that you are deeply sinful. If you say you see, you're blind. If you say you're blind, you're starting to see.
 - a. This was Paul in Phil. 3: "[A]s to righteousness under the law, [I was] blameless," so I thought (v. 6).
 - b. But then I met Christ on that Damascus road, and I saw myself for what I truly am: the chief of sinners (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15).

E. Every violation of one of the ten commandments, even telling what might seem to us a little lie, is ultimately connected to and flowing out from our breaking of that first and most significant commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3).

1. When we sin, however big or small, we make a run on God's throne. We will be God. We will call the shots. We will do what we want to do.
 - a. And such mutiny, brothers and sisters, not only is it wretched, it deserves God's judgment: ["the wages of sin is death"](#) (Rom. 6:23).
- F. So this story of Ananias and Sapphira is meant to shake us awake! Don't downplay your sin. Don't excuse it away. Don't flatter yourself by comparing your faults to another's. That is not how God's judgment works. He doesn't grade on a curve. Any sin is too much sin before a holy God!

Accent #3: The Wonder of the Cross

- A. But then there is one last thing this "immediate death" accents for us: the wonder of the cross.
 1. We are not meant to read this story in isolation from the cross of Christ.
 2. We are meant to read it, as with all Scripture, in light of the cross of Christ, towards the cross of Christ.
- B. Ananias and Sapphira conspire to sin against the Lord, and they drop dead for it. God's judgment comes in sudden and surprising fashion.
 1. And it cannot be lost on us that Jesus, the holy and beloved Son of God, suffered a similar fate, though he had no sin . . .
- C. It's interesting, but I wonder if you realize that Jesus on that cross, he actually died at a much more rapid rate than was anticipated for a someone crucified in the manner he was.
 1. I was alerted to this very fact this past week when I was reading in Mark's gospel for my devotions. And in his account of this whole affair, when Pilate hears that Jesus has already passed, already breathed his last, he ["was surprised to hear that he should have already died"](#) (Mark 15:44). And he proceeds to ask a centurion for further confirmation of this fact.
 - a. It would often take several days before a cross-hung man would finally give way to asphyxiation or exhaustion or something like this.
- D. So why so rapid for Jesus?
 1. Well, I think it's because the full fury of the Father's wrath was being poured out upon him in those moments, and the sheer weight of it all crushed him.
 - a. This is why he cries out: ["My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"](#) (Mark 15:34). ["Why are you treating me like Ananias and Sapphira? Have I not loved you with my whole heart, mind, soul, and strength?!"](#)
 - i. Ananias and Sapphira, they couldn't cry out with such words. They knew full well why they were dropping dead under the judgment of God. They were stealing from him, lying to him, testing him.

- ii. But Jesus, he had done nothing wrong. His whole life had been one, not of stealing but of giving, not of lying but of truth-telling, not of testing God but of trusting him with everything he had.

- (1) And yet, just like Ananias and Saphira, on that cross, in no time at all, he breathes his last.

- (2) And a man named Joseph of Arimathea, much like the “young men” in [Acts 5](#), comes to gather the corpse of our Lord and bury it away.

E. Why? Why does Jesus endure such things?

- 1. Because God is holy.
- 2. Because we are sinful.
- 3. And because the Father, Son, and Spirit had conspired in love from all eternity to make a way for our salvation.

- a. And the cross accomplishes that salvation, amazingly, without compromising God’s holiness nor minimizing our sinfulness. Jesus gets the judgment, so we can get the mercy.

F. That is why I say this story of Ananias and Sapphira, while it accents the holiness of God and the wretchedness of sin, it also accents for us the wonder of the cross.

Why No Mercy for Them?

A. But now we have to ask: Why weren’t Ananias and Sapphira shown mercy here? Why does Jesus’ death not seem to count for them? Why are they dying for their sin, if, in one sense at least, he already died for it? Why isn’t he at least patient with them?

- 1. Well, there is much we could say here, but I’ll have to be brief . . .

B. The first thing we have to make clear is this: no one deserves mercy.

- 1. The very definition of mercy is to be given that which you don’t deserve. You deserve one thing, but you get another. That’s mercy.
- 2. To put it another way: Though we initially might be troubled by the fact that God puts these two to death here for their sin, what should truly trouble us is the fact that he hasn’t yet done the same for us!
 - a. The bigger question here is not why are these two killed? It’s why am I still alive? I’m not all that different. Why is there still air in my lungs? Truly it’s not the execution of justice that should trouble us, but the extension of mercy. Why? We don’t deserve it.

C. But then, secondly, we must remember, as I said last week, Jesus’ payment for us at Calvary is not automatically deposited in our account.

1. It's as if he writes a check and sets it on the table in front of us. The amount is enough to pay off all our debts to a holy God now and forever.
 2. But the check won't benefit us if we don't take it up and cash it. Or, in other words, if we don't repent and receive the grace that is offered to us in him by faith.
 - a. If you don't think you have a debt with the Father, if you think you have enough resources on your own to cover it, if you're too busy and distracted to care one way or the other, and you don't take the gospel to the bank, as it were—you won't benefit from what he's done. You have to cash the check.
 - i. So it's possible Ananias and Sapphira never really did. Maybe they knew of Jesus, but they didn't really know him. Maybe that's where some of us are.
- D. The last thing I'd say is it's actually quite possible that Ananias and Sapphira are being shown mercy here.
1. What do I mean? Well, we have to admit: we don't know exactly where they stood with the Lord. Maybe they truly had repented and believed. Maybe they did cash the check. Maybe they were born again believers, true Christians, but they were making some bad decisions, like we often do, grieving the Holy Spirit within them (cf. [Eph. 4:30](#)).
 - a. Listen, in this case, God's judgment comes in not as the wrath of a judge, because Jesus took that for them, but as the discipline of a loving Father. A loving dad won't let his kids play over top a venomous snake hole.
 2. This is precisely the thing Paul seems to be talking about happening in the Corinthian church I mentioned last time.
 - a. Because they were partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, Paul says that they were eating and drinking "judgment" on themselves ([1 Cor. 10:29](#)).
 - b. He goes on to write: "[That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died](#)" ([v. 30](#)). Well, you say, "Nick, that sounds like wrath."
 - c. Oh but he goes on: "[But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world](#)" ([v. 32](#)).
 3. Listen, there is such a thing as a severe mercy in God's economy.
 - a. Remember, this life is not all there is. God is looking at you with a view to all eternity.
 - b. If you are walking in sin, stepping perilously close to the precipice of unbelief and apostasy, there may come a time where God will have to kill you to save you.
 - i. And if he does, it won't be wrath. It will be discipline.
 - ii. But, furthermore, it will be mercy.
- E. Whatever the case in all of this with Ananias and Sapphira, one thing we know for sure: "[the Judge of all the earth \[will\] do what is just](#)" ([Gen. 18:25](#)). He's going to do what's right.

Result #2: Great Fear

Not a Bad Thing

- A. Here I simply want you to notice the way Luke closes out both of the little vignettes with Ananias and then Sapphira. He points out how all this affected those who were hearing about it in the Christian community.
1. So in v. 5 we read: “And great fear came upon all who heard of it.”
 2. And then, similarly, down in v. 11: “And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.”
 - a. Now when we hear “fear” perhaps we think of it as a bad thing. You think of the Halloween type of fear, with villains, or that sort of thing—where you fear something because that thing is bad, it’s evil, it’s scary.
- B. But I want you to understand, in the Bible, the fear of the Lord is not a bad thing at all.
1. It’s the beginning of wisdom. It’s a sign of sanity. It means you are coming to see reality, things as they really are—that God is God and you are not; that you do deserve judgment for your sin and you have no claim on his favor should he not choose to be merciful to you.
 2. In fact, conversely, all the trouble starts in the Scriptures when people aren’t fearing the Lord. They play with sin and act like it doesn’t matter. They think they know better. There’s no humility and teachability.
 - a. Sometimes you deal with this with your kids, don’t you? “How could you stand here and talk to your dad the way that you do. Do you know who I am? Yes, I love you, but where is the appropriate fear of your father? You just act like you’re on the same level as me, like you’re the head of the home, like you know better.”
 - i. And we do this with God. It’s insanity.
 - ii. And this fear puts us back in our place. It’s not a bad thing. It’s a good thing
- ...

Great Fear and Great Grace

- A. This is why, by the way, even in our story, if you noticed, Luke tells us there is both “great grace” (Acts 4:33) and “great fear” (Acts 5:5, 11) upon the people.
1. Great grace and great fear. The two are not at odds with each other. They are not contradicting realities. They come together. They go hand in hand. You know there is great grace upon a person when there is also great fear of the Lord in their heart.
- B. If you think you only need one or the other, you see how you end up in all manner of problems.

1. On the one hand, if you think all you need is grace of God, but don't need to fear him, then inevitably you'll start to presume upon that grace. You're not worried about sin anymore. After all, why would you? He'll just forgive you. He's patient. He's gracious.
 - a. You misinterpret his patience with you as leniency, as if he's really not all that holy after all and sin really isn't all that wretched. It doesn't matter.
 - i. You fall into that same error Paul was addressing in [Rom. 2:3-4](#) when he writes: *"³Do you suppose, O man . . . that you will escape the judgment of God?⁴Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"*
 2. Or on the other side, if you so emphasize the fear of the Lord but miss his great grace, well then you end up in a sort of legalistic funk, where you are trying so hard on your own strength to please him and become something, and you'll never get there.
 - a. God is scary and ready to punish you. And you'll never measure up. And then eventually you just give up. Why would you want relationship with that God anyway?
 3. But if you have great grace and great fear, well then you see the love of God for you, and you're confident in it, but you're also not messing around with sin or acting like you're entitled to his kindness. You know it's all of mercy.
 - a. You tremble before his holiness, but you trust Jesus to be enough for you, so you can come near anyway, with confidence, and find grace to help in your time of need.
- C. I wonder: Where are you in all this, do you think?
1. Are you so focused on the grace of God that you're missing the fear of God?
 2. Or do you have so much of the fear, that you're missing the grace?
 3. God wants us to have both. And, in Jesus, we can!

Result #3: Exponential Growth

Who Would Have Thought?!

- A. I think fear as a response to this whole episode with Ananias and Sapphira probably makes sense to us. Of course they were trembling after all this. Wouldn't you be?
- B. But this third result, my goodness, I'm not sure we would have anticipated this. Exponential growth? The church just explodes in number like never before.
 1. Look at [v. 14](#): *"And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women . . ."*

- a. I don't think that is what many of us would expect. God comes in judgment, he kills some folks for their sin, and all those in the surrounding cities, they hear of it and think: "How can we get in on that?!" Really? Doesn't that shake up your preconceptions a bit?
- C. Oftentimes with the church, here in America in particular, aren't we tempted to go the very opposite direction in our attempts at church growth?
 - 1. We water down the Word of God, especially those scary portions about his judgment and all this. We trumpet God's love and grace for all, but we whisper (if we speak at all!) when we come texts about his wrath or, God forbid, hell.
 - a. And we do so because we don't want to scare people away. We want to attract people. That's what will lead us to growth like never before. If we talk about his wrath, they'll leave. If we emphasize his love, they'll come.
 - 2. And maybe they do, for a little while. But here's what's so interesting.
 - a. You talk to people about why they don't come to church. And, maybe for some, the initial issue is this idea of the judgement of God. It seems so severe.
 - b. But if you do away with that doctrine and the reality of church discipline and things, they come into the church and do you want to know what their issue will be then? The hypocrisy of Christians. "They claim to be following Jesus and pursuing righteousness and all this, but they live just like everyone else. In fact, many times they're worse. If Jesus is real, why's he letting them get away with this?" So they leave.
- D. Here's what I'm getting at: God strikes Ananias and Sapphira dead as a means of keeping his church pure, as way of protecting her from hypocrisy, from that leaven which could leaven the whole lump.
 - 1. And when people hear of this judgment, though at first it might be a bit of a turnoff, in the end it will be compelling, why? Because it will lead to a people who have a fear of the Lord and are truly changed by his grace. These are people who know God!
- E. So . . .
 - 1. On the one hand, if you water down the holiness of God and his judgment in an effort to get people in through the front door of your church, they will eventually walk right out the back door—because of hypocrisy, because sin is allowed to run rampant and there's no fear of God in the place.
 - 2. But, on the other hand, if you preach the full counsel of God and don't hide from the harder truths, though at first the doctrine of God's judgment might keep people from the front door of your church because it sounds mean or unkind, they will eventually end up coming in through the back door—because they see the holiness of God's people, that they're truly changed and loving, and they sense the power and the wonder and the goodness of God among us!

- a. I want to be that kind of church! Don't you?! That's why we spend two weeks on Ananias and Sapphira.

F. And thus commences our tour of the back alley ;)