



**Acts – Can I get a Witness?**  
**Wk. 16 The Silent Killer of the Church**  
**By Pastor Jody May 01/15/2023**

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**Acts 5:1-11 ESV**

**Ananias and Sapphira**

**5** But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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? <sup>4</sup>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.” <sup>5</sup>When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. <sup>6</sup>The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

<sup>7</sup>After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup>And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.” <sup>9</sup>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.” <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

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**[INTRODUCTION]**

**Recently in the News:**

**George Santos**, the **New York Republican congressman-elect** at the center of a storm over his apparently fabricated résumé, has admitted he lied about his job experience and college education during his successful US House campaign.<sup>1</sup> It’s not that he embellished a little as it seems most politicians do now a days, but that he embellished a lot! He had no higher-level education, has no experience in the banking sector, when he said he was Jewish he

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/dec/27/new-york-congressman-elect-george-santos-admits-lying-about-college-and-work-history>.



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meant he had ancestors who were Jews because he's really Catholic which makes him "Jew-ish", and that he was gay but was recently divorced from his wife in 2019. It seems that the Republican party has found the man that meets everyone's standard. This is the classic example of what we call a **hypocrite**, someone who claims to be something or someone else other than what they really are.

You can see here also the roots of what makes a hypocrite, that is the dominating trait of pragmatism do whatever is necessary to get what one wants, or the *Ends justify the means*, **that attitude stems from ain, what we call Envy/Covetousness in the Bible.**

The church is no different when it comes to the sin of hypocrisy, as a matter of fact it used to be the leading excuse among people on why they would not attend church or why they left the church in the first place, because it was full of hypocrites. Of which we would say, "Well then you should feel at home!"

In essence, "hypocrisy" (hoop-ok'-ree-sis) refers to **the act of claiming to believe something but acting in a different manner**. The word is derived from the Greek term for "actor"—literally, "one who wears a mask"—in other words, someone who pretends to be what he/she is not. The **Bible calls hypocrisy a sin**. Jesus even went one step further and taught us that for God's people the direct result of hypocrisy is that God will have no part in helping you get what you want, the reason that one became a hypocrite in the first place.

**Matthew 6:1 ESV**

Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people to be seen by them (practicing hypocrisy), for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

There are two forms hypocrisy can take: **1<sup>st</sup>** that of professing belief in something and then acting in a manner contrary to that belief **(as when Paul confronted Peter):**

**Galatians 2:11-12 & 14 ESV**



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“But when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I (Paul) opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

**2<sup>nd</sup>** it is that of looking down on others when we ourselves are flawed as Jesus taught us in a parable –

**Luke 18:10-14 ESV**

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ <sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

It should be pointed out in volume 1 of Luke’s work, his gospel, that was **Jesus’ main problem** he had with the **Pharisees, their hypocrisy**. In the beginning we see that He tried to work alongside with them, in the middle He begins to confront them, and at the end of His ministry He publically condemns them.

**Matthew 23:27-28 ESV**

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!** For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

The Apostle John I think points to the reason why people have a problem with attending a church where they might run into hypocrites:



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**I John 4:20 ESV**

If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

People watch how we treat each other in the church, and why should anyone want to go somewhere where they claim to love God and not love each other?

They also see how we rant and complain about everyone and everything, looking no different than the world. They see Christianity as being a false religion, or at least a religion that is not worth the time or the effort.

**James 1:26 ESV**

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

Of course, we need to admit, the **other problem** the church has today is the **muddled definition of love**. The world's definition of love is to accept and affirm everything about a person you care about. That is the furthest thing from how the **Bible defines love** which is a **covenantal and sacrificial act** that is more concerned with the spiritual and eternal welfare of the individual.

But today's sermon is not even from the perspective of worrying about what the world sees, it is **about the health of the church**. Up to this point in Acts the church has been healthy, it was birthed out of very good conditions to initiate growth.

**[RECAP]**

To grow her strong God had allowed one of its' first challenges to be a direct external assault of the Sanhedrin, the same bullies that accosted Jesus, and fulfilled their destiny of hanging Jesus on a cross. Peter and John withstood the challenge, they rejected the charge of not be able to preach healing and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name, and got their brothers and sisters riled up about it.



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This bunch of young new baby believers got all fired-up, like a bunch of **obnoxious Dawg fans** during halftime at the National Championships. They were chest bumping, fist waving, and like UGA fans, they even got more unpalatable for the Jewish elite because they decided to get BOLD with speaking out for Jesus! Then on top of that the **HS descended**, He joined the pep rally, and now they are riding cloud nine!

The byproduct of this was the screenshot picture of a GLORIOUS church, where all those in the church had all things in Common, they were changed by the Gospel, they reveled in the Gospel, and the proclaimed the Gospel with all boldness. It's like trying to live with a true DAWG fans in this room for the next year.

It's at this point that the Devil changes tactics and the **challenge** becomes more **covert**. Along with a direct external assault which we are still dealing with to this day, the church began its' **two-front war**. They now would not only face a direct external challenge to their preaching and living out of the Gospel, but they would now face a challenge that comes from within, a challenge from within their ranks. They would face what has become the silent killer of the church over the last 2,000 years.

This is why we are calling this sermon ***The Silent Killer of the Church***; it is the observation of the sin of Hypocrisy, a two-faced cancerous growth, that sneaks in among God's people and decimates its' members. Today we want to observe the **signs** of hypocrisy, see God's attitude towards it, and how we can steer clear of it.

**1. The Signs of Hypocrisy all stem from Envy.**

So every year, about this time, I make this journey to the skin doctor, it's not my most favorite time of the year. And he scans my skin with a blacklight, and he and his assistant probe my skin looking for signs of the silent killer Melanoma. I haven't had it YET, but I get the other kind often enough thank you S. Florida sun! But in the offices when you leave with your scars and bandages are all the pamphlets of what to look for, what are the early signs, of a silent killer that could sneak up on you and take your life without knowing.



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**That's Hypocrisy;** if it is left untreated, if you don't detect it, it will do some real damage in the church, and can even threaten its' life.

Let's look now at some signs of this silent killer so we can be able to distinguish it from other sins.<sup>2</sup>

**Spiritual Posers:**

**5** But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,<sup>2</sup> 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.

They sold a piece of property and kept part of the proceeds back for themselves, both are ok to do BUT both things were premeditated, and Sapphira was ok with it. What we have is two people more concerned with appearances, now what brought them to this point?

**Acts 4:36-37 ESV**

<sup>36</sup> Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, <sup>37</sup> sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

They were envious! They saw what it was like to have people revere you. Something most likely happened in what Barnabas did that caught everyone by surprise, I mean Luke recorded it, whether it was because he was a Levite, or perhaps everyone was blown away with that type of sacrifice, whatever it was it got them thinking this is something they want.

This is the public phenomenon we have seen in Christian Music over the last couple of decades. Many a musician has been lured to Christian music, have risen to prominent positions in churches, and became a dark spot on the ministry of the church. When the church decided to emphasize modern music, modern stage theatrics in the church, it drew to it musicians who were just posers and wanted the notoriety that came with playing on a stage. It is

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition / Exalting Jesus in Acts, (Holman Press: Nashville, Tennessee, 2017). I used his three sinner titles for this section.



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one of the reasons we are low-key with music presentation, and we emphasize corporate worship where all participate, so we keep away from the lure of attracting or producing posers.

**Praise Seekers:**

They say that “**Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery that mediocrity can pay to greatness.**” – Oscar Wilde. That may be, but the root of that flattery is still a **covetous spirit**. Ten years ago, we use to snicker at all the young, restless, and reformed pastors playing homage to Mark Driscoll that wore flannel, grew beards, drank awful IPAs, pretended to like MMA, and wrote sermons entitled “10 reasons why you are stupid, now grow up and be a man!” Their imitation told you something about themselves, there was something they wanted, it was something that Driscoll had, **the admiration of church people**. That’s exactly what got to Ananias and Saphira...

**Fat Liars:**

<sup>3</sup>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?”

Just like Hypocrisy which everyone has the capability of doing for it is a part of our depraved nature everyone is born a natural liar (Rom. 3:13), and our sinful hearts will seek to use that which it already knows how to do to get what it is after. This is what sets us at odds with God though, God gives us exactly what we need at all times, lying is the action of not accepting His will for our lives and spitting in God’s eye.

<sup>4</sup>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.”

The Silent killer for all of us is Hypocrisy, pretending to be something we are not, pretending to be more than what we are, and both these things have the same warning signs, an **Envious Heart**. What’s more, the fruit of an Envious





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Heart, **in the church**, is a direct act of sin against God and His will for the whole body.

**Proverbs 6:16-18 ESV**

There are six things that the LORD hates,  
seven that are an abomination to him:

- <sup>17</sup> haughty eyes, a lying tongue,  
and hands that shed innocent blood,
- <sup>18</sup> a heart that devises wicked plans,  
feet that make haste to run to evil,

God desires obedience and holiness and these commands are something the body is to do together (1 Pet. 1:16). God is actively conforming us into His Son's image through how the body works out life together, so when we live as a Hypocrite and give in to our envious hearts- to pose as a Christian to be admired, to seek praise of men not God, to lie about our motives - we are actively and intentionally going against the plans of God. He will not stand for it, there is too much at stake, Jesus will not lose sheep because of an envious heart. And if there is no repentance, if there is not a change, God will remove the cancer.

**2. The final stage of Hypocrisy is a Death Sentence.**

<sup>5</sup>When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last... <sup>6</sup>The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

<sup>7</sup>After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup>And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." <sup>9</sup>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." <sup>10</sup>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.





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Now when we read this, I know there is a sense of, “Isn’t this a little overreacting?” But the **principle** being played out here is **the closer we are to God’s Holiness the more sever the consequence**. God takes lying very serious, especially when it is right up next to Him, remember, in Acts 4, that the body was experiencing a manifested presence of the HS (the shaking of the house). It is the same phenomenon you read about this past week when God’s presence descended on the newly constructed temple.

Peter says to Ananias why did you, “**keep back**” that term comes from the Greek word to steal. This same rare word is used in the Greek form of the OT in Joshua 7 in the story of Achan. Achan was a veteran of Jericho, but Achan stole from Jericho that which was destined for destruction. Because of his sin, his deceitfulness, when the next city was under siege Israel incurred a huge loss of life. One man, one sin, next to God’s holiness, caused a lot of damage not just physically but emotionally to the people of Israel. He too was convicted and tried for treason, and it cost him the loss of his life and his family as well.

These events show the seriousness of God’s will and the preservation of His name. To have allowed the infection of Ananias and Saphira is to cheapen the story of the cross, it would diminish the testimony of the church, it takes from the power of the Gospel. To allow the greedy to remain, to allow the direct lie to the HS, would **tell the world that sin is not that serious**, the cross was not necessary, and Jesus’ death was a mistake. No, to react in that moment any other way to show God is not God.

I can sit with you here today and tell you story after story of pastors, worship leaders, church members, who neglected to watch for the signs. They may not have died, but I can tell you that principle of the greater manifestation of God’s glory and His holiness it seems the harder the fall. Cancer removal is the only way hypocrisy is removed from the body and just like Melanoma, you have to dig deep and wide and it usually leaves a nasty scar in the body.

This event shows us the need for the Gospel in our lives, this story adds to our preservation, because if you are converted you have the same reaction as the first century church.



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<sup>5</sup>When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And **great fear** came upon all who heard of it.

<sup>11</sup>And **great fear** came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

Fear of the Holiness of God is what helps generate repentance, have we not learned today the seriousness of hypocrisy and the dangers of a runaway envious heart. So how can we respond to this? We should be a little scared yes, but we should be more scared of wasting our time living in a weak unempowered church without God's presence. Is there something we can do strategically before Envy takes root, before Hypocrisy becomes a part of our lives?

**[CHALLENGE + APPLICATION]**

**3. We survive Hypocrisy by believing and living out the Gospel.**

The **Gospel will inoculate us** from the **effects of Envy**, it is the **cure** for the disease of **Hypocrisy**. The Gospel keeps us **focused on** the one that deserves praise, **the Lord Jesus**, for He is the only one that deserves **notice**, that **deserves recognition for His life**.

- He doesn't have to pretend to be Holy, He set the standard for Holiness by remaining separate from this world to complete God's will.
- He doesn't have to seek praise, but all His disciples praised His name anyway, and then ended up dying for it as well. That has produced for two thousand years praise producing factories in our hearts.
- He never had to lie to get what He wanted but He always told the Truth and God gave Him what He wanted Him to have; a glorious suffering death with an even more glorious resurrection.

How do we fight Hypocrisy!? You get your gaze off yourself, and you transfix it on Christ, and you do all you can to bring Him the recognition that your heart desires for yourself. How will you know the cure fixed you? The day you get



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glory, the day God raises you up in front of others like Barnabas, you won't want it anymore.

**Practical Ways to start taking in the Gospel Cure:**

- We fight Envy with Generosity.
- We ditch self-preservation and practice both private and public confession.
- We put away condemnation (because that contributes to hypocrisy) and practice Gospel Encouragement.

Family let us strive together today and seek to glorify our Jesus together, let us remain fearful of our Father knowing He will not tolerate Hypocrisy, and let us continue to live in the Spirit together finding our commonality in outdoing one another in love.

**[PRAYER]**

**[COMMUNION]**

**[BENEDICTION]**

Go in the name of the Father, that will continue to seek the health and preservation of His church through the removal of Hypocrisy.

Go in the name of the Son, in who we will set our eyes upon to take in the cure for our envious hearts, He alone should be praised.

Go in the name and power of the Holy Spirit, who will continue to manifest Himself in our lives with demonstrations of healing envious hearts now go and share this good news.