

SUNDAY BIBLE STUDY NOTES

— November 19, 2017 —

Pastor Les Smith

SERIES: Preparing the Church to Leave the Building

SERMON: So, What’s The Harm in a Little White Lie?

Text: Acts 4:37-5:11

Central Message:

We live in a culture that not only condones dishonesty but encourages it. We seem to have lost our moral center, and truth has become what we choose to believe rather than what has been established in the unchanging word of God. There was a time in Biblical history called “The Judges” that feels eerily similar to what is going on in our world today. Every man seems to be doing what is right in his own eyes. The book of Acts gives us another picture of growth in the New Testament church. The practice of selling possessions to help the poor was a beautiful gesture, but it was tarnished by a couple who wanted the recognition for giving but not the sacrifice. They chose to lie to the Holy Spirit, and it cost them their lives.

General Observations

Our text today gives us a clear picture of the danger of telling a lie...even a lie that we might consider insignificant. A little “white” lie is still a lie, and every lie is still a sin. Lying puts us in the league with the devil, the Father of Lies; lying makes us subject to swift and severe consequences.

One of the dangers in telling a little “white” lie is that it makes us complicit with the Father of Lies. (Acts 5:1-3)

In the story of Ananias and Sapphira, we find a couple that had fallen prey to one of Satan’s tricks. When Satan attacks believers, his main target is the mind. He

uses three devices...*lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life* to ensnare us. Ananias allowed his foolish pride to prompt him to lie to the Holy Spirit, and his wife was fully complicit. What he did not know is that they both were complicit with the Father of Lies. According to Jeremiah 17:9, lying is a heart issue. We don't know whether Ananias had a habit of lying, but what we do know is that lying is not just about what you do...lying is also very much about who you are.

One of the dangers of telling a little “white” lie is that we must face God knowing that He is fully cognizant of the truth. (Acts 5:3)

Peter confronted Ananias about his gift. His argument was simple and straight forward. He told Ananias that the property belonged to him in the beginning and when he sold the property, the proceeds from the sale were his. He could have brought a portion of the proceeds which would have been acknowledgement that it was only a portion, and everything would have been fine. Instead, he presented his gift as if he was giving the entire proceeds of the sale. That was a lie, and Peter, with the discernment given to him by the Holy Spirit, saw right through the ruse.

The message for us is clear. God gives discernment to those who are His. When we maintain a close and intimate relationship with Him, he gives us the ability to discern spiritual matters.

One of the dangers of telling a little “white” lie is that we have to face swift and stern consequences. (Acts 5:4-10)

As soon as Peter completed his rebuke of Ananias, he fell dead at Peter's feet, and young men carried him out and buried him. I am sure that Ananias never conceived that lying about a gift to help the poor would constitute a capital crime for which he would forfeit his life. The lesson for us is that God takes his word seriously. All sin is punishable by death, and the fact that we are spared that fate when we sin has nothing to do with us. God will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy. It is His choice. Consequently, we should take the sin of lying as seriously as God does. Hours after Ananias had met his fate, his wife came in, not

knowing what had happened to her husband. Peter gave her an opportunity to “come clean”, but she stuck by her lie, and in the same manner as Ananias, she fell dead at Peter’s feet. There are always consequences for sin. We may be spared the most severe of those consequences, but only because of God’s grace and mercy.

One of the dangers in telling a little “white” lie is that it can have a corrupting influence on the whole church. (Acts 5:11)

Twice in the text, Luke mentions that fear fell upon all who heard about the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. I believe that one of God’s purposes in causing the death of this couple was to warn the church, then and now, that lying is a serious matter. Scripture tells us in clear and unambiguous terms that it is better not to make a vow than to make a vow and not keep it. Perhaps the words that put this into an even clearer perspective come to us from Proverbs 6:

¹⁶ There are six things which the LORD hates,

Yes, seven which are an abomination ^{to} Him:

¹⁷ Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,

And hands that shed innocent blood,

¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans,

Feet that run rapidly to evil,

¹⁹ A false witness *who* utters lies,

And one who ^{spreads} strife among brothers. (*Proverbs 6:16-19*)