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Right Thing for the Wrong Reason"*

BIBLE STUDY BASED ON ACTS 5: 1-11  
"DOING THE RIGHT THING FOR THE WRONG REASON"

by Pastor Michael W. Dietz

Pacific Northwest District Convention  
Evergreen Lutheran High School  
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Translation (NIV): 1) Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2) With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. 3) Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4) Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." 5) When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. 6) Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. 7) About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8) Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." 9) Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." 10) At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11) Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

The setting: The first Christian congregation at Jerusalem was a congregation such as the world has never seen again. The members were very eager to grow in the knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and firmly adhered to the doctrine taught them by the apostles. Among other things they had true loving fellowship (communion) with one another. In the verses previous to Acts 5, we're told that they were "of one heart and one soul." They fully realized that they were stewards of their possessions, that God was the real owner of all they had, not they. There was a community of goods, and they had a common treasury. No one was compelled to sell his property and put the proceeds of it into a common treasury. As this congregation was nourished by Word and Sacraments, its members grew in faith and the fruits of faith. As a result some of them (motivated by love for the Lord) sold some of their possessions and gave the proceeds for the work of the Lord.

The study:

verse one: Ananias = Greek form of the Hebrew, Hananiah - "Jehovah is gracious"  
Sapphira = "beautiful"

verse two: the hypocritical plan they devised - sell some of their possessions, bring only a part of the funds to the apostles, but in some way try to make their fellow Christians believe that they were donating the full price of the sale. Greed of money & praise was at the root of his sin.

verse three: Peter accused Ananias of lying directly to the Holy Spirit and of allowing Satan to gain full possession of his heart. He was governed by the devil and not by the Holy Spirit.  
How did Peter know all this? cf. I Cor 12:10 "To another discerning of spirits"

verse four: Peter shows Ananias the severity of his sin "...not lied to men but to God." cf. Prov 19:5 "He that speaketh lies shall not escape."  
Ananias was not forced to sell his possessions, nor to give all of it to the Lord.

- verse five: Ananias died. Some try to explain this away by saying that he died of natural causes (heart attack, stroke, etc.) cf. Ps 5:6 "Thou wilt destroy them that speak leasing"(speak a lie).  
reaction to his sudden death - fear - fear = awe for faith & fright for flesh
- verse six: the burial - custom and climate dictated an immediate burial
- verse seven: Sapphira's arrival - various speculations about why she didn't come with Ananias - ignorant of what had happened to Ananias
- verse eight: Peter seeks repentance - she brazenly repeated the lie which she and Ananias had agreed upon
- verse nine: Peter's dismay at their wicked deed and promise of her demise the severity of punishment - The offense of Ananias and Sapphira, according to the average standard of human morality was not a very heinous one. They had devoted a large sum to charity, they had defrauded no one, but had simply retained their own and then denied the fact. Yet, Since the Holy Spirit was present with unparalleled power in the Church, the sin, as Peter said, was directly against Him. At this crucial time of the beginning of the Christian Church an example was made of the justified punishment of the hypocrite. This couple were deliberate, positive, conceited, and intentionally permanent hypocrites. Their death was God's declaration to all that He is not pleased by doing the right thing for the wrong reasons.
- verse ten: Sapphira is buried
- verse eleven: the result - many people heard about it and feared - again, awe for faith & fright for flesh

We can profit from this!

- God always looks at the heart of the giver, not the size of the gift.
- Only love motivates! cf. I Cor 13 & I John 4:19
- We will strive for:
  - 1) properly motivated
  - 2) cheerful (cf. II Cor 9:7)
  - 3) first-fruit giving.
- Only by bearing these thoughts in mind and imparting them to our fellow Christians will "Reaching Out" be successful.

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