

Last week we talked about not allowing God to become an abstraction in our lives. We defined that as the removing of God from our daily experiences and from experiential life. We also came to understand that it is removing the characteristics about God that make us uncomfortable or challenge the things we want to hang onto in our lives. This especially applies to things that are disobedient to God and more often than not turning God into an abstraction brings destruction to our lives.

So today I want to give you an illustrative message from the Bible that shows how this happens, why it happens and hopefully we learn how to avoid this happening in our own lives.

God has always had a great distaste for insincerity, hypocrisy and even lukewarmness in our spiritual lives. Throughout the recorded history of the Bible men and women have found ways to try to get around God and circumvent His will while trying to maintain their faith and testimony. It is impossible!

Let me give you some examples you can study on your own before I share the story we are looking at today.

Adam and Eve: thought they could hide from God after they disobeyed His one and only command. You can't hide from God.

Cain and Abel: Cain tried to hold off God's questioning by stalling and asking, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Children of Israel: dared to murmur and complain thinking somehow that God didn't hear them but only Moses their leader.

Balaam: thought that he could sneak down to a foreign King's house and deliver a curse against God's people for money and that God wouldn't notice.

Samson: did the one thing God told him not to do – gave up the secret of his strength and was severely punished for it.

Lot's wife: she had already experienced deliverance from Sodom but assumed she could take one last look at her home city even though God said explicitly "Don't look back."

King Saul: took God's worship into his own hands and was judged by God for it.

King David: departed from God by committing adultery and murder. He lost some of his children because of it.

Jonah: rose up and fled to Tarshish when God said go to Nineveh.

Judas: betrayed Jesus Christ for a few pieces of silver and lost his life because of it.

All of these people share some things in common:

- a. They knew what it was to have God's favor in their lives
- b. Traded His favor for a few moments of selfish indulgence
- c. They all lost a great deal because of their foolish choices

It never pays to let our view of God get cloudy and our relationship with Him get stale.

Here is the story for us to work with today:

But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property. ² He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife's consent, he kept the rest.

³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. ⁴ The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us but to God!"

⁵ As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified. ⁶ Then some young men got up, wrapped him in a sheet, and took him out and buried him.

⁷ About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, "Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?"

"Yes," she replied, "that was the price."

⁹ And Peter said, "How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? The young men who buried your husband are just outside the door, and they will carry you out, too."

¹⁰ Instantly, she fell to the floor and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Great fear gripped the entire church and everyone else who heard what had happened. Acts 5:1-11 NLT

1. It always starts with an attitude: Presumptuous Decisions

To presume on the grace of God is one of the most dangerous sins we can commit. In all honesty, presumption is the basis of the indulgence of all sin in a person's life.

It can take on many forms:

I'll get right with God before I die.

There are so many really big sins so surely God wouldn't bother with mine.

I know I should be a Christian but not right now.

I will just do this once because I know God will forgive me!

I can do this and it won't hurt anyone because no one will ever know!

God is our Heavenly Father. He loves me! Does He not want me to be happy? I know my Father wants me to have this, because it will make me happy!

God may have been strict in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament we are under a system of grace. Therefore, we are not in bondage to worry about keeping every law perfectly. We do not have to worry about tedious, detailed observances of any kind.

Do you really think God would send me to hell just for doing this?

Will God really condemn me for this one sin?

What's so bad about doing this?

Who will be hurt by doing that?

It is presumption that keeps professing Christians holding on to secret sins.

It is presumption that causes people to point out other people's sins and faults in hopes of hiding their own.

It is presumption to think that you never have to make restitution for your sin.

It would be blanket presumption, not to mention sheer stupidity on my part to string a wire between two tall buildings and presume that I could walk across it without falling.

This is exactly what Ananias and Sapphira did when they conspired between them to deceive the church and the apostles. They were trying to look good without telling all the truth. To understand why chapter 5 starts out with the word but you have to go back to chapter four.

All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had.³³ The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great blessing was upon them all.³⁴ There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them³⁵ and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.³⁶ For instance, there was Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means "Son of Encouragement"). He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus.³⁷ He sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles. Acts 4:32-37 NLT

The church was united and was in a mode of taking care of each other especially in light of the economic havoc due to their faith. They lost their jobs and their properties as well as their lives for following Christ. Others stepped up to aid and assist. This couple however conspired together to sell a property but instead of giving like others they would pretend to give it all but retain some of it for themselves. The Apostle Peter challenged them in their lack of honesty.

⁴ *The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us but to God!*" Acts 5:4 NLT

It's a question we have to deal with in our own lives: "How could you do a thing like this?"

2. It leads to an action: Personal Deception

² *He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife's consent, he kept the rest.*³ *Then Peter said, "Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself.* Acts 5:2-3 NLT

The word deceiver should be a dirty word for all of us. Deceit, deception and deceiving are awful words. Deceit literally means to ensnare someone, mislead, to lead someone to believe what is false. (Fraud, cheat)

Unfortunately our modern education system has taught situational ethics for many decades. In other words, the ends justify the means or do whatever it takes to reach your goal. I am amazed at how acceptable lying has become for some professing Christians if it means avoiding trouble or saving face. It is total presumption for us to assume that we can do such things and not pay a price.

Let me tell you that there is such a thing as "being overtaken in a sin." You didn't plan it, you didn't see it coming but you fell into something that overtook you. The good news is you stopped. You repented and you have moved on. That is not a presumptuous sin. Presumption is when you know better but you keep on doing what you know is wrong.

It is the person that sins today and tomorrow and the next day, week after week, month after month and year after year until they have piled up a mountain of sin. It is deliberate. It is intentional and without remorse. It has become a habit that is more powerful than God in your life.

For Ananias and his wife, they were looking something other than God to satisfy a need inside of them. For whatever reason, they thought it would be worth it to tell a lie and do the opposite of what they should have done.

True Biblical worship so satisfies our total personality that we don't have to shop around for man-made substitutes. William Temple made this clear in his masterful definition of worship: *"For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose—and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin."*

What's going on in your life? Take a moment to be really honest and let the Holy Spirit search your heart.

3. There is an admonition for us: Public Destruction

⁵ As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified. ⁶ Then some young men got up, wrapped him in a sheet, and took him out and buried him.

⁷ About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, "Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?"

"Yes," she replied, "that was the price."

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¹⁰ Instantly, she fell to the floor and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Great fear gripped the entire church and everyone else who heard what had happened. Acts 5:5-11 NLT

It is personal. Presumptuous sins, presuming on God's grace, living false lives, doing things that we know are wrong but assuming that somehow we are different and that God will look at us differently.

For men and women that want to be authentic disciples of Jesus Christ, living double lives or embracing deceitfulness is not an option.

Now here is what I know. I know that it doesn't matter who you are or how long you've been in church or a professing Christian, the devil is out to destroy you and me any way he can find to do it. Often people will find themselves in circumstances in their life that they never imagined. Discouragement sets in and before you know it you've listened to the lies of the devil and you start searching for your own way. You start trying to fill the void left in your life because of one thing or the other. Before you know it you are in a place you don't want to be and it seems impossible to ever break free or get out of it.

So what do we do? Ananias and his wife never got a second chance but if you are listening to this today you have a chance to get it right.

There is an answer: Purposeful Duty

Be honest: Admit it

The best thing you can do when you are not where you need to be is just admit it. There is no substitute for coming clean and being honest about it. In James 5 we find these

words, “*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results*”

Be sorry: Repent

*From then on Jesus began to preach, “**Repent** of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”* Matthew 4:17 NLT

*I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to **repent**.”* Luke 5:32 NLT

*Now **repent** of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away.* Acts 3:19 NLT

*The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to **repent**.* 2 Peter 3:9 NLT

Be vigilant: Guard your heart

*Be on **guard**. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong.* 1 Corinthians 16:13 NLT

Every one of us ought to memorize the following scripture: Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

⁸ *And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.* Philippians 4:6-8 NLT

Be surrendered: Always put God first

Whatever you've not surrendered to God you need to let go of it. IF you and I could ever grasp the truth of putting God first in every area of our lives can you imagine what could happen? That's the call that you need to hear. As a church and as individuals some of us are purposing to make sure that there is nothing held back from God.

Bruce Larson tells how he helped people struggling to surrender their lives to Christ:

"For many years I worked in New York City and counseled at my office any number of people who were wrestling with this yes-or-no decision. Often I would suggest they walk with me from my office down to the RCA Building on Fifth Avenue. In the entrance of that building is a gigantic statue of Atlas, a beautifully proportioned man who, with all his muscles straining, is holding the world upon his shoulders. There he is, the most

powerfully built man in the world, and he can barely stand up under this burden. 'Now that's one way to live,' I would point out to my companion, 'trying to carry the world on your shoulders. But now come across the street with me.'

On the other side of Fifth Avenue is Saint Patrick's Cathedral, and there behind the high altar is a little shrine of the boy Jesus, perhaps eight or nine years old, and with no effort he is holding the world in one hand. My point was illustrated graphically.

We have a choice. We can carry the world on our shoulders, or we can say, 'I give up, Lord; here's my life. I give you my world, the whole world.'

What are you going to do? Are you going to hang on to your sin or would you like to be clean and know that is nothing in the way between you and God?

Prayers for help: I will share a few but not all of these Biblical prayers before closing.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. Psalm 139:23-24 NLT

Keep your servant from deliberate sins! Don't let them control me. Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin. Psalm 19:13 NLT

Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression. Psalm 19:13 NKJV

Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. ² Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. Psalm 51:1-2 NLT

Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me—now let me rejoice. ⁹ Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. Psalm 51:8-10 NLT

You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God. Psalm 51:16-17 NLT

Show me the right path, O LORD; point out the road for me to follow. ⁵ Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you. Psalm 25:4-5 NLT

Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am in distress. Tears blur my eyes. My body and soul are withering away. Psalm 31:9 NLT

Save me, O God, for the floodwaters are up to my neck.² Deeper and deeper I sink into the mire; I can't find a foothold. I am in deep water, and the floods overwhelm me.³ I am exhausted from crying for help; my throat is parched. Psalm 69 NLT

O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help. Psalm 86:5 NLT

My eyes are blinded by my tears. Each day I beg for your help, O Lord; I lift my hands to you for mercy. Psalm 88:9 NLT

Come now, let's settle this," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool.¹⁹ If you will only obey Me, you will have plenty to eat.²⁰ But if you turn away and refuse to listen, you will be devoured by the sword of your enemies. I, the LORD, have spoken!" Isaiah 1:18-20 NLT

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.² This I declare about the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; He is my God, and I trust Him. Psalm 91:1-2 NLT