

A PIECE OF LAND AND A PACK OF LIES

Presented by

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In Blake's sermon, "The Importance of Always Telling the Truth," he reminded us of the fact that the Old Testament places a high premium on truth by urging us to "buy it, and sell it not." Blake also mentioned that the Old Testament condemns lying. Yes, it certainly does. Not only does the ninth commandment in Exodus 20:16 forbid lying, but we also find other examples of God's specific instructions to His people on this matter. Leviticus 19:11, for example, says, "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, **nor lie to one another.**" Solomon, speaking through inspiration of the Holy Spirit, discussed seven things that "the Lord **hates,**" among which is "**a lying tongue**" (Proverbs 6:16).

The importance of telling the truth is a common theme throughout God's Word. This should not surprise us, since the Bible makes it clear that truth is part of the very essence of God's character. King David once said of the Lord, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy **and truth** go before Your face" (Psalm 89:14). Earlier in Psalm 15:1 David had asked, "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?" In the next verse David answered those two questions when he wrote, "It is he who walks uprightly, works righteousness, **and speaks the truth.**"

Not surprisingly, the New Testament likewise places a great premium on always speaking the truth. The apostle Paul admonished Christians, "Put away lying, and let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another (Ephesians 4:25). But the New Testament also addresses the **consequences** of **not** telling the truth. The apostle John painted an ugly picture about liars when he wrote, "Blessed are those who do God's commandments, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, **and whoever loves and practices a lie**" (Revelation 22:14-15). One chapter earlier, in Revelation 21:8, John had foretold the eternal destiny of people who do not tell the truth when he said, "All liars shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." The fact that God's Word tells us that we will go hell if we do not tell the truth should cause us to think seriously about lying, don't you think?

Surely it is not by accident that the New Testament provides us with a true story about two people who conspired to tell a lie because they apparently thought they could get away with it. But they were badly mistaken! Acts 5 tells us what happened.

Two Christians—a husband and wife by the name of Ananias and Sapphira—owned a parcel of land. One day they decided to sell their piece of property so they could give the money from its sale to the Lord's church. We know for certain that that was a commendable thing for them to want to do, because 2 Corinthians 9:7 tells us that "God loves a cheerful giver." Plus, in Mark 4:24 Jesus Himself reminded us,

“The measure you give will be the measure you get.” As we begin to read the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, it **appears** as if this first-century Christian couple possessed pure hearts that were anxious to perform a truly benevolent act in order to help others. But, as we all know, appearances can be deceiving. As Acts 5:2 goes on to explain, Ananias and Sapphira decided to hold back part of the proceeds from the sale of the land for their own use. At this point, let me ask you a question. Would there have been anything wrong with Ananias and Sapphira selling their property, and then giving a certain portion of the funds from the sale to the church, while using what was left for their own purposes? Of course not. As long as Ananias and Sapphira gave “as they had prospered” (1 Corinthians 16:2), and as long as they gave their gifts to God cheerfully, they could have used the proceeds from the sale of the land in any way they saw fit.

Unfortunately, that is **not** what they did. Instead, they made a pact with each other to give a certain portion of the money to the church, all the while claiming that they had given **all** of the money to the Lord. Acts 5 tells us that Ananias went by himself to present the money to the apostles. Peter, however, knew what Ananias was doing, and asked him,

“Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God” (vss. 3-4).

Because Ananias told a lie, he lost his life! As the apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 6:7 “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” Ananias—to use the words of the prophet in Hosea 8:7—“sowed the wind, and reaped the whirlwind.” One moment he was alive; the next he was dead—all because of a lie.

But the story does not end there. Acts 5:7-9 tells us what happened next.

“Now it was about three hours later when Ananias’ wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?’ She said, ‘Yes, for so much.’ Then Peter said to her, ‘How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.’ Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband.”

As Christians, Ananias and Sapphira could have sold their property, given part of the proceeds to the church, and kept the rest for themselves—and everything would have been fine. Instead, they chose to perpetrate a lie—and ended up dying as a result. No wonder Paul said, “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:9).

What effect do you think these events had on other Christians? Acts 5:11 answers that question when it says simply, “Great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.” **I’m not surprised!** If I was a Christian living in the first century, and I heard about what had happened to Ananias

and Sapphira when they told a lie, the last thing I would **ever** want to do would be to **tell a lie**. The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira set a critically important example, not just for Christians in the first century, but also for Christians of every age since. As Proverbs 6:17 says, God **hates** “a lying tongue.” If the Bible tells us that God hates something, we would do well to stay as far away from that thing as we can, don’t you think?

I recall one other biblical example of a person whose lie cost him his life. In 2 Samuel 1 we find the account of the death of Israel’s first king, Saul, who was wounded in a battle with the Philistines, and then chose to commit suicide rather than be taken captive by his enemies. After the battle was over, an Amalekite man came to David to tell him that Saul was dead. When David asked what had happened, the man—because he thought David would reward him if **he** was the one who had slain Saul—fabricated a lie about how he had killed the king who had tried to kill David on so many occasions. But as soon as David heard the man’s story, he turned to him and said, “How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?” (2 Samuel 1:14). David then ordered the Amalekite’s execution for having killed the man whom God Himself had appointed to be the king of Israel! Can’t you just imagine the Amalekite screaming out as he was dying, “**But I was lying! I was lying! I didn’t really kill Saul!**” Yet it was too late. His lie had cost him his life, just as the lies of Ananias and Sapphira cost them their lives.

Nothing truly good can come from lying. Plus, think about this. In the Bible God has commanded us, “Be holy, as I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). Titus 1:2 tells us that we serve a “God who cannot lie.” If God is holy, and if God will not lie, then if we want to be holy like God, we will not lie either. It’s that simple. What a shame it is that Ananias, Sapphira, and the Amalekite man did not stop to think about that. I hope we today will not make the same mistake they made.