

Women of the New Testament – Lesson 12: Sapphira

Psalm 94:11 The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.

Did we learn our lesson? Study Questions from Lesson 10 (Lois and Eunice)

1. According to Acts 16:1, in what town did Paul meet Timothy and his family?

Answer: Lystra.

2. According to Acts 16:1, how does Paul describe Timothy's mother and father?

Answer: His mother was a Jewess and believed, and his father was Greek.

3. According to 2 Timothy 1:5, how does Paul describe the faith of Lois and Eunice?

Answer: Unfeigned.

4. According to 2 Timothy 3:15, what is the result of Timothy's childhood training?

Answer: He has known the scriptures, and recognizes that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ.

5. Complete the following scripture:

Mark 9:37 Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me.

True / False

True Timothy had a good reputation in other towns as well (ACTS 16:2 – Well reported at Lystra & Iconium)

True Faith produces works (JAM 2:18 - Shew thee my faith by my works)

False Works establishes salvation (MATT 7:23 - I never knew you)

False A child's emotional condition is irrelevant in education (EPH 6:4 – provoke not your children to wrath)

Extra Credit - In your opinion, are you a good parent, and why or why not?

Lesson 12: Sapphira

'Work she may, but shine she must' – Emma Lazarus (1849 – 1887), American Poet

The spirit of the poem is of the radiance one brings. Specifically the brilliance of heart when one selflessly applies their efforts, and others are the better for it. But that's not the application I will be using – More along the lines of the seafarers who spend endless hours ensuring equipment looks good, whether it is functional or not – Building a reputation of leadership that appearance is more important than actual.

The bad news is that the later concept is closer to the reality of human nature:

- **Psalm 39:5** Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.

In our current worldly limits, all we accomplish in this world is temporary and fleeting (**REV 21:1** – Old heaven and earth passed away) and all is nothing before God as this world and all in it will be consumed. It is only the spiritual (**JOHN 3:15-17** – Eternal through Christ) that endures.

There are multiple industries accumulating vast wealth on the vanity of humanity (physical appearance, clothes, automobiles, where we shop, who we see, etc.) – People are spending great sums of money and expending great effort to look good instead of being good (it is much more difficult to be than to look).

This is a strategy of Satan as the deceiver can easily adapt to accommodate humanity's weaknesses. When the ravaging approach (**1 PET 5:8** – As a roaring lion) is not effective, Satan may attack from within (**2 COR 11:13-14** – False apostle or angel of light), posing to be something he is not, to keep you from God.

In this lesson, the attack from within is examined as we witness the example the Lord provided in Sapphira.

Who is Sapphira

Sapphira (beautiful in Aramaic) was a Jewish woman living in Jerusalem with her husband Ananias. They were property owners, and most likely lived a comfortable life, It is not known if they had wealth or had occupations that provided well. We can deduce it is most likely the former, as they are concerned about their wealth.

Living in Jerusalem during the time of Christ must have been a highly charged atmosphere, as this Jesus of Nazareth did things no one had ever witnessed before, with many miracles performed in the open:

- **Luke 7:22-23 – The Lord is open to all**

(22) Then Jesus answering said unto them, **Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.**

(23) **And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.**

- **Luke 21:37-38 – The Lord publicly teaching**

(37) And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called *the mount* of Olives.

(38) And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, for to hear him.

- **John 12:12-13 – The Lord is a very public figure**

(12) On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,

(13) Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.

The Lord's ministry was there for all to see (**ACTS 26:26** – Not done in a corner) and would influence many, and challenge many others.

Sapphira had to know of Jesus, and must have had an opinion one way or the other, but we can have confidence there was limited involvement, as we will later examine.

The momentum shifted for Sapphira when the believers began to form a presence as a society. On the day of Pentecost (**ACTS 2** – The arrival of the Holy Spirit) miracles were performed, Peter's boldness encouraged about 3,000 to come to Christ, and there was a change in culture as many Jewish people (Sapphira's family, friends and neighbors) began to embrace this new life (**ACTS 4:32** – The multitude of believers of one heart, one mind, and all things in common) – No one wants to feel left out, especially if you were once 'in'.

The new standard is set

Acts 4:36-37 – A believer demonstrates complete commitment

(36) And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, *and* of the country of Cyprus,

(37) Having land, sold *it*, and brought the money, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

Barnabas acts in complete faith and gathers all his assets to present to the Lord (all on the altar) – He sets the bar to the absolute top, as anything less than 'all' is just that – less, and reveals a potential lack of commitment.

Acts 5:1-2 – Another attempts to mimic (appearance only)

(1) But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

(2) And kept back *part* of the price, his wife also being privy *to it*, and brought a certain part, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

Sapphira and Ananias were caught up in the social momentum (everyone in a good emotional state, sharing and giving, with no bitterness, malice – Not like when you owe someone and cannot reconcile). However, it is unlikely they were spiritually aligned with the other believers but wanted to show that they were. The obvious method is to do what Barnabas did and donate their all! It would make such an impression on everyone:

- **Galatians 1:10 – Who do you please**

(10) For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

As Paul reveals his reason for bringing the gospel – To please Christ, it is a reminder that we should examine the intent of our behavior: Who are we trying to please?

- **Matthew 6:1-2 – What reward do you seek**

(1) Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

(2) Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

The Lord defines those who make a show of their religious pretense as He notes them as 'hypocrites' who are only fooling themselves as they forfeit a heavenly reward for the temporary rewards of this world.

What is revealed is that it was a show – They were probably concerned about money as they could not bear to part with all, and it was easier to lie (look good) than tell the truth (be good).

The outcome

Acts 5:7-10 – A believer demonstrates commitment

(7) And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

(8) And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

(9) Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband *are* at the door, and shall carry thee out.

(10) Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying *her* forth, buried *her* by her husband.

Conspiring to deceive is evidence that Satan has had a hand in this action (**ACTS 5:3** – Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie) and there is a heavy price to pay, as both Sapphira and Ananias were now dead.

It is not unusual for the Lord to exercise such swift and harsh judgement:

- **Leviticus 10:1-2 – The Lord is just**

(1) And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not.

(2) And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

When the Lord establishes a new period (**LEV** – The giving of the law / **ACTS** – The introduction of grace) the Lord makes quick and complete judgement to educate the rest of the flock (ACTS 5:11 – Great fear came upon all the church): **Proverbs 9:10** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom

The Lord presents Sapphira as an example of the necessity of aligning yourself with God – All else is a deception that may become an obstacle between you and the Lord – If you let it.

Next Lesson: Tabitha

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Study Questions

1. According to Acts 5:1, who was Sapphira's husband?

2. According to Acts 5:1, what was the source of their donation?

3. According to Acts 5:9, who did Sapphira and Ananias deceive?

4. According to Acts 5:10, what happened to Sapphira?

5. Complete the following scripture:

Psalm 94:11 The LORD knoweth the thoughts of _____, that they are _____.

True / False

Reference

T F This world will be preserved forever

T F Sapphira was a farm worker

T F Barnabas gave all to the Lord

T F Sapphira and Ananias gave all to the Lord

EXTRA CREDIT – In your opinion, are you holding anything back from the Lord, and if so, and what?
