



The Fear of God - Part 1

And our Behavior

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Hey, you know, on baptism weekend up here, we got the tanks going, we got people coming out giving their testimony. I always ask a question that needs a little clarification. And I know you're sick and tired of the question, but the question is, does baptism save you? And you have to ask a clarifying question and that is "which one." You have to say which one, because we're not sure whether if you ask that question, you're talking about what you're about to do, dunking people in water or whether we're talking about being baptized into Christ by his Spirit. And that would help answer that question accurately, biblically. In studying Acts as we get back into the book of Acts, in particular Chapters 5 and 6, I couldn't help but think that there's a question I should probably start asking you that does the same thing as it relates to the topic of the next couple of weeks here, next six weeks to be exact. And that is, should Christians be afraid? Should Christians be afraid? Before you say, "Well, of course not," because I'm thinking of several passages here that say, you know, fear not, Luke 12. Right? "Fear not, little flock, for I've given you the kingdom." I mean, that's a great statement. Jesus saying "be not afraid" repeatedly to have statements in First John 4 that "perfect love cast out all fear." I mean, you'd want to say, "No, no, no, no, you shouldn't fear."

Well, in Luke Chapter 12, the same passage that says, "fear not little flock," it says, "I'll tell you who to fear," Jesus says, "fear the one who can kill the body and cast the soul into hell." "Yes, I tell you," and he starts out with this, "friends," he's talking to his disciples, "fear him." I looked at the Bible and I want to be a wise man and the Bible says wise men fear the Lord. It says, matter of fact, "fear is the beginning of wisdom." I'm not even going to get wise unless you fear God. Abraham, he's hailed for being a man who fears the Lord and a trustworthy man. Joseph, because he feared the Lord. You see passages of Scripture regarding our salvation that "you ought to work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

Great Greek insight for you, are you ready? A little Greek language. I went to seminary to learn this. "Fear" in Greek means "fear." That's what it means. "It's got to mean something else if you're telling me that some passages say fear and some passages say they don't fear." Same thing, different object. When I say, "should the Christian be afraid," you should ask, "which one are you talking about? Which fear and fear of what and fear of whom?" Because we've seen in the book of Acts the apostles being hailed as great godly men because they didn't fear the opposition. They stood before the very empowered, authoritative council that turned Christ over to be crucified. That Sanhedrin stood Peter and John before them and said, "Stop preaching in the name of Jesus." And they unabashedly and unafraid they said, "No, we're not going to stop. There's no other name given under heaven by which men must be saved. We're going to preach the name of Christ, we're not going to be afraid."

Then they come back to the Church assembled near the bottom of Chapter 4 and they pray for boldness. We're not going to be afraid. Courage, we're not going to be afraid. And all of that is a great thing. It's set up as what we should do. We saw in that last passage a great



picture of the Church functioning as it ought to, with all the good happening within the fellowship and Barnabas stepping up and encouraging the Church by his generosity.

Things are good and it's all right and they're not afraid of anyone. Well, they are afraid of someone. They're afraid of God. Matter of fact, that's the theme throughout the Bible, is that you ought to fear God. Out of the 611 times the topic of fear and being afraid comes up 305 of those times say you ought to be afraid, and it's all about being afraid of God. We ought to fear God. "Well, that's for non-Christian." No, that's for Christians, too. As Peter says, you call on Father, this one in your prayers, you say, Father, Father, that's so endearing. It says but you need to know he's going to judge each man's work impartially. So you ought to live in fear during your days on the earth. So fear means fear. That means you're not comfortable.

Just like if I were to send you to lunch today with someone. Oh, let's just start with this. You would be comfortable if I sent you lunch with someone who's, you know, fairly intelligent and has a really decent job, maybe middle upper management and they're good people, good, decent people. You'd feel comfortable. But soon as I started ratcheting all of those columns up and said, "Well, you know what? They're not just smart, they're not just intelligent, they're like a super genius. And not only that, they're not just, you know, management, it's the dictator of a small country. And when it comes to righteousness, they don't do anything wrong. They are so holy and righteous. Everything they do is righteous."

See, the more you ramp those things up, guess what? The more uncomfortable you're going to get. And yet many of us have so domesticated our relationship with God is that we don't fear God because we think it's wrong to fear God. In our prayers, we have no uneasiness, no unsettledness, no discomfort when we think about God because we've been taught you should not... if you're a Christian, you should not fear. Some people think that baptism saves them and they unfortunately think it's water baptism that saves them because they don't make the distinguishing feature. Baptism does save you. Baptism, being placed into Christ saves you, not water baptism. And you should not fear, if we're talking about your enemies, your opponents, the devil, or even the condemnation of the Lake of Fire. Do not fear those things. But there is something that you should definitely fear and that is God.

"I can't love God and fear him at the same time." Oh, you sure can. I hope you grew up with a dad that way, one that you feared and also loved. I hope you recognize these are not mutually exclusive responses to an authoritative, super-intelligent, in this case, omniscient, righteous, he's called holy being this God who you pray to every day.

God makes the point in Acts Chapters 5 and 6 that we ought to fear God. We're going to talk about the righteous, appropriate fear of God that we ought to have. There are three reasons to fear God built into the first 11 verses of Acts Chapter 5, and I want you to take a look at it with me, beginning with one simple, contrastive conjunction, the word "but." Look at this with me. Take your Bibles out. Don't just stare at me. Look at your Bibles, pull them out, pull it out on your phone or your iPad or your printed Bible and look at Acts Chapter 5, we're going to study 11 verses. That's why we come to church to study the Bible. We're going to hear what God has to say so we can shape and mold our view of who God is and conform it to what



God has revealed about himself. This is the kind of passage people just skip right over. They don't want to talk about this because they think, well, "It doesn't fit my view of God." But we're not supposed to have the Bible fit your view of God, we're supposed to have our view of God fit the Bible. So let's study this passage and find three reasons we ought to fear the Lord. Very important that we fear God. What does that mean?

Well, let's think about the context, Joseph a.k.a. Barnabas giving money, caring for the Church financially, everyone giving of course. But he gave a big gift. Everyone's impressed with that. They give him the name Son of Encouragement, such an encouraging person. The Church is functioning and they're bold and their pastors are bold and unafraid. It's all looking good. And then you have the word, verse 1, Acts 5, "But a man named Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, sold a piece of property," sounds like Barnabas, he sold a piece of property, but in this case it was "with his wife's knowledge," verse 2, "that he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet," same phrase used of Barnabas. Here it is. "Hey, pastors use this money for the good of the Church and the advancement of the gospel and the meeting of needs in the body of Christ."

"But," there's another contrastive conjunction. That sounds like a good thing. "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you've contrived this deed in your heart? You've not lied to man, but to God.' When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it." I guess so. The offering is passed, someone puts in a big check and they die. I mean, that's going to change the tone of the service a little bit.

Not only that, it comes preceded with a conversation with the pastor. They just put in a huge check and the pastor goes, "Why did you contrive this deed?" Ananias says, "What are you talking about? I'm giving a big amount of money here?" Peter continues, "Yeah, but you're acting like you sold a piece of property and you gave the entire proceeds, just like Barnabas did," in the previous chapter, "and you're acting like you gave all the proceeds when in fact, you didn't." And still, I'm just baffled. God, you're going to kill someone over that? It just seems unreasonable. Matter of fact, this is a passage people look to to say God, the God of the Bible is unreasonable. Some people even said maybe this didn't belong in the Bible. That'll certainly set a tone of fear among the people when someone reaches out to give to the church and they die simply because they're acting like they gave all of it when they only gave part of it.

Verse 6, "The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.' And she said, 'Yeah, yeah, for so much,'" that was the price. "But Peter said to her, 'How is it that you've agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.' Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last." Do you want an appointment with the pastor at that point? Think about it. You're talking with



the pastor about your giving and two people have died. "When the young men came in they found her dead," middle of verse 10, "and they carried her out and buried her alongside her husband. And great fear," not just fear, "great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard these things." Now, this is an appropriate fear, a fear that's going to later be referenced in the book of Acts as why the Church was growing and favored. They were growing in the fear of God and this was a good thing, because half of the references to fear are positive references to fear, the kind of fear that we should all have.

Now, just so you understand the problem, it is a slight problem on the surface. Let's just quantify it. I don't know what Barnabas sold his property for, but let's say he had a piece of property, maybe it was on the island of Cyprus where he's from, and he sells that property, and he's not selling, you know, a refrigerator or, you know, a PlayStation. He's selling something of massive value. This is a piece of property. Hadn't changed. That's a huge asset. Let's just say it wasn't his primary residence. So he sells a piece of property that was in his family or whatever it might have been. Let's just quantify it, let's just say it was a \$50,000 piece of property and he sells it and he comes and he says, "Hey, Peter, I've sold this piece of property. I want to give it to the Church, just use it to meet needs, use it to advance the gospel, do it." And everyone goes, "That's awesome."

Then Ananias and Sapphira, they get together and they say, "Hey, we own a piece of property we can sell. They're given nicknames to Joseph, they're calling him Barnabas. I mean, this is such a great thing. They see him as a godly man. You know what? Let's sell our piece of property. We really don't need it anyway. Let's sell this other piece of property we have. And it's a bigger piece of property than Barnabas'. Let's just speculate here. It's a \$100,000 piece of property. But I'll tell you what, let's go and give it to the Church. We'll give them \$60,000. We'll pocket \$40,000 because I hear there's a really great Mediterranean cruise we can go on, we can remodel our house. It'll be awesome. We'll hold back \$40,000. We'll give \$60,000. That's even \$10,000 more than Barnabas gave. Can you imagine the plaque on the pew we're going to get? They're going to name, you know, the church library after us. This will be awesome. Let's go and give them \$60,000 and we don't have to tell them that we held back \$40,000."

I just got to ask you a question. Who is being hurt by that lie? Anybody? I mean, seriously. I mean, if someone comes to me and says, "Hey, that Compass 2020 thing you're doing, launching the Compass Bible Institute, you're going to remodel the campus. It's great. I sold a piece of property. You know what? Here's \$60,000. I sold the property, here it is." I'm not going to sit around and ask you, was it just \$60,000? I mean, I'm going to be like, "Dude, thanks. That's awesome. We can put that to use for the glory of God, the advancement of the kingdom, planting of churches. That's awesome. Congratulations."

And yet here, for some reason, God made sure that Peter knew, how he knew it doesn't say, but he knows they didn't sell it for \$60,000, they sold it for \$100,000. And they're making it like they sold it for \$60,000 and what do they want? Who's being hurt? Is this dirty money? Is it like they did something wrong? They're running some illegal operation or they're skimming money, they're extorting money. Or, you know, maybe it's like you come back from Vegas one



weekend and go, "Man, I had a great weekend in Vegas and I played the table. I got \$60,000, I'm going to the church." Now. I'm going to be a little, you know, like, "uh...", but not you selling your property. I mean, what's wrong with that? And that you don't tell me that it's all...? I mean, even if you lied to me about it, who is being hurt by that?

Peter seems to think here it's a huge deal. "You're lying to God." What are you talking about? I just want you to process this. Because I know that you and I think that the things that we do so often are small things and to us they are small things and you can even say, "You know what, I deceived for the sake of my reputation. But really, who's being hurt by it? Oh, maybe people think I'm a little more godly than I actually am. But really, who's being hurt?" You'd have a point when it comes to us sitting around talking about big sins versus small sins, but to God, it's a big sin.

Had Jesus warned about people trying to be made out as more godly than they actually are? How often did Jesus say, "Beware the leaven of the Pharisees." Beware of just acting a little bit and replicating a little bit of the attitude of the Pharisees. And what was the main attitude of the Pharisees? Matthew 23. "Woe to the Pharisees? Why? Because they're 'hypocrites.'" They're hypocrites. They're hypocrites. They're trying to be made out as righteous people. In Chapter 6 of Matthew, he said, when they're going to pray, man, they're going to let everybody know they're going to can pray, they're going to pray long prayers. They're going to "pray on the street corners, make sure everybody sees it." They want everyone to think they're godly and they're actually deceiving. They're deceiving people into thinking they're something that they're not. And when it's time for giving oh they give, but they "blow trumpets," let everybody know, "Hey, everybody, I'm giving a big offering today." They make sure people know it. That was a big sin to God.

But to us, not that big of a sin, because most of us judge sin as to whether or not anyone is hurt by it. Well, apparently God was hurt by it. But you and I really, if we have an issue where someone is simply lying and it seems like a victimless crime, I just want you to know what's going on in this passage. But God says, I want my Church to be holy. I don't want them to lie. I don't want them to deceive. I don't want them to worry about their reputation and try and inflate their reputation to have people think they're more godly than they actually are.

Now, my sermon is not just about the particular sin of Ananias and Sapphira, deception for the sake of reputation. Because I'm not sure what sin it is that you're being tempted with this week. But whatever that sin is, I want you to come away from this sermon the way that the early Church came away from looking at what God did in Ananias' and Sapphira's life and saying, "Wow, I've got some reasons to fear." And the first thing you ought to fear, number one, if you're taking notes, jot this down. You ought to "Fear God's Discipline," because God surely disciplined the Church and these two people in particular for simply covering up some information, holding back a little bit on the whole story so that they could be perceived as holy and righteous, more holy and righteous than they were. Because you know what? They could have kept all their money. I mean, that's what Peter said, "It was your property, you could have kept it, you could have sold it, liquidated it. You could have done whatever you want. You could have taken 10 cruises. You could have done whatever you want. But you came



and pretended that you were giving it all to God and you weren't. And then God disciplines them.

In Hebrews Chapter 12, it says that God, in essence, let me summarize, is a disciplinarian. God is a God who will discipline us for our sins. Here's the thing, though, about God. He generally is long-suffering. That means from the first time we do it, he's not happy about it. He is, quote unquote "suffering." And then we just seem to keep on and keep at it and we seem to get away with it and like Psalm 50 says, we just kind of assume God's fine with it because I haven't been narked, I haven't been busted, I haven't been disciplined. But at some point God deals with us like our parents dealt with us. And our parents didn't always immediately respond. Sometimes they're seeing if the simple nudges of correction will help us, but eventually he'll discipline us.

Matter of fact, let's look at that passage real quick. Hebrews Chapter 12. Hebrews Chapter 12 says you need to "remember the exhortation that was given to you as sons." Now, look at that poetic part of this passage. In Hebrews Chapter 12, it's got all that white space around it as he quotes the Old Testament text in the middle of verse 5. He says, "My son do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord nor be weary when reproved by him." Don't go, "Man, I hate the fact that he disciplines us." Well, I know it's not pleasant, but "the Lord disciplines the ones he loves." "He chastises every son whom he receives." That word chastise, I mean, that's kind of a, you know, nicely dressed up word that doesn't have the sense that it had originally, which is he spansk them, it hurts, corporal punishment. He will bring pain into our lives when we continue in our sin.

"It's for discipline that you have to endure." You recognize that you have God's hand of discipline on your life when you sin, and at times it comes quickly, sometimes it comes after a long period of rebellion. "God's treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" Well, obviously it wasn't written in the 21st century in Orange County, but you understand that the general historic way that parents dealt with their sons. "If you're left without discipline, in which all of us have participated, well, then you're illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we all had earthly fathers," verse 9, "who disciplined us and we respected them. How much more shall we be subject to the Father of spirits and live for? They disciplined us," our earthly parents, "for a short time," for just a few years here in our childhood, "as seen best to them. But he, God, he knows everything. He knows our heart, our intention, our motives, even the secret things like Ananias and Sapphira and what they were up to. "He disciplines us for our own good," because he sees everything. The whole point is "that we can be holy."

And in this case, Ananias and Sapphira had no further chance to be holy. But guess what? Everyone who feared after seeing this happen, they had a chance to say, "Wow, holiness matters to God." "For all," it says here in verse 11, "For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness for those who have been trained by it." Now, corporately, the Church is being trained by it in Acts Chapter 5 and Acts Chapter 6. Individually, though, since you're here listening to me, God didn't strike you down because of your sin last week. You're still alive. You get a chance now to think



about your training and holiness, your sanctification. You need to know that God disciplines us and sometimes he disciplines us in ways that are embarrassing, they out us, they sometimes are painful, they cost us in a variety of ways. And that discipline is something that you ought to fear. You ought to fear that just like you feared your parents getting mad and getting up to discipline you.

My brother and I, rambunctious, normal brothers, living in Long Beach, my dad would be there after a long day's work laying on the couch. We would be doing things we shouldn't be doing. We've been told not to do them. mom said stop doing it. And at some point dad's had enough. He's long-suffering and patient, but he gets up and when he starts to get up my brother and I knew that his patience had run out. It's time for discipline. That's when we start backpedaling and all that because we know we've done it now. Dad's getting off the couch. That's the normal course of events.

Well, that's not what's happening in Chapter 5 of Acts, right? I mean, the first thing, they just give... they're not blowing trumpets when they give, they're not going on the street corners and praying long prayers like the Pharisees. It's the first hint of the pharisaicism within the Church, and God springs off the couch immediately and doesn't just ground them for the weekend. You're grounded for the rest of your life. What in the world?

You understand that these things were written for our instruction. The reason this happens early on in the book of Acts is so that the book of Acts can show us how important it is to remember how God's discipline should be respected. Here's a stronger word. We ought to fear it. That is, "God, I don't want to be disciplined this week. I don't want to have the consequences of my sin because God can do a couple of things. Maybe the things that you did this last week and you know you've repeatedly done them. God has not gotten off the couch. But, you know, at any moment he could get off the couch. And one thing you could do is remove his hand of protection from the consequences of your decisions.

"God is not mocked," Galatians Chapter 6, "whatever a man sows he's going to reap. If you sow to the flesh, you're going to reap from the flesh corruption." Just think about the fleshly decisions you made this week and you haven't experienced that corruption yet because God's hand of protection. Well, he could remove that hand, he could get off the couch and say, no, now you're going to get the consequences of your sin. He could do that. You should fear. It should be the thing that makes you on a Thursday afternoon when you're tempted to do that thing, say, "I'm not going to do it, I'm afraid of his discipline." You know that he's a disciplinarian. And you say, "No, I'm not going to do that."

He could not only let you just simply experience the consequences of your sin, he could impose some consequences, some artificial consequences, that have no relationship to this sin. They're artificial only in the sense that it's not just sowing and reaping in that particular area, he could bring something else in. It could have nothing to do with your health and then God could all of a sudden could take your health away. That's what it says in First Corinthians Chapter 11, because of their sin that seem very small at the Lord's table where they were turning it into a potluck and acting like it was all about them, and they weren't soberly



considering the life of Christ. And he said, "That's why some among you are sick, some are weak and some have died." You got chronic fatigue, you got illness and you got some people you've had to bury and all of it's been because of discipline.

It says, if you would just "judge yourself, you wouldn't have to be judged by God." These are Christians we're talking about. "God's not going to judge me." Maybe that's why you don't think you should fear God. You should fear God because judgment starts with the household of God. That's what the Bible teaches, First Peter Chapter 2. Matter of fact, you're in Hebrews Chapter 12, turn back two chapters. This statement to the gathered people of God claiming to be under the Lordship of Christ, he says, you need to see this as severely and seriously as you should because God cannot sit passively by when we sin and not have a visceral reaction to this, a reaction that's going to lead him to get off the couch. At some point, he'll get off the couch.

Here's the reason why. Because if you sit here today and say, "Well, that's not part of what I've learned in Christianity because I'm under grace, I'm a Christian, no condemnation for those in Christ." I need to ask you a question if you're thinking that way or tempted to think that way. Where did the punishment for your sins go? "Well, I'm forgiven." Did it evaporate? If God is holy and there are wages to be paid for sin and there's punishment for sin, and if in God's universe, as a holy God, he has to respond to unholy and unrighteous behavior, what happened to the consequences of the sins that you're saying are forgiven? Where did they go?

Drop down in this passage in Hebrews Chapter 10 to verse 29. We'll get the context in a second, but just look at this statement. "How much worse," this is Hebrews 10:29, look at it. "How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved the one who has trampled underfoot, the Son of God?" What in the world are you talking about? You've walked on the body of Christ? Yeah. "You've profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace." Now, there's one that's probably not printed on a nice piece of paper and framed and put in your house somewhere. Right? "How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot, the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has outraged the Spirit of grace?"

If you're sitting here today saying, "I'm under grace, I'm under Christ, God looks at me and my sins are forgiven." I'm asking, have those consequences evaporated or do you not believe that Christ died for you? "Well I do." Well, you know what that means, right? The penal, legal, substitution is a replacement atonement of Christ. You believe in substitutionary atonement. That means that God in his justice has to somehow find propitiation, a legal satisfaction, for your sins. How are you healed from your sins? In other words, how does God see you no longer as sinful but righteous? Well, because he has to take my sin and lay them on Christ. That means that I guess Christ, according to Second Corinthians 5, had to suffer for your sins. The sin that you committed on Thursday. He had to suffer for that? That's what the Bible teaches.



Your sins were laid on him "by his stripes you were healed." Now, let's just think about this, the stripes. So we're talking about things like when Christ's back got whipped, when Roman soldiers took fists and beaten him in the face to where he was unrecognizable, according to Isaiah Chapter 52 and 53. So he's being beaten. His teeth are getting knocked out. He's getting black eyes, he's bleeding. They're putting a crown of thorns on his head. They're spitting in his face. They're cursing and mocking him with all the vulgarity. They're stripping his clothes completely off of him, naked. They're making fun of him. And then they've beat him and they've whipped him and they put him on a wooden beam so that everyone could jeer at him.

That happened to him. Why? Those of you under grace, those of you who have been forgiven. Why? Because of your sin. So the sin that you commit, every one of them has to be paid for. And if you say I'm a Christian, they were paid for by Christ, then that means they had to be paid for by Christ. I mean, that's the point. Therefore, when I think about how God must view me, when I, maybe like Ananias, want to deceive you, I want to lie to you, I want to lie to you so that you can think I'm more holy than I actually am, then that sin somehow had to be dealt with by God. How is that going to make God respond?

I mean, when I think about what my sins deserve, even if they are laid on Christ, then I'm set apart under grace, I recognize this, there is a really visceral reaction. It's called the wrath of God. And though God's condemnation for eternity has been laid on Christ and there's no future condemnation for me and I'm not going to face the Great White Throne judgment and I'm not going to be thrown in the Lake of Fire, how does God respond to his sinning people who know the knowledge of that transaction of penal substitutionary atonement. How does God respond to that?

Look at the context, verse 26, "For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." Where do you think that sin goes? "But only a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries." Now, I know there are two ways to view this passage, but even if we're just thinking about those who sit there in church thinking that because they're under grace, my sin doesn't really matter that much. Why would God ever discipline me to have me stop doing it? What does it matter if I do it? It's all paid for by Christ. Well, it is paid for by Christ. Just like every punch is paying for sins, your sins still are paid for.

It may be an anachronism, do you follow me? It may be something that was done out of time. You sin now in this year, even though 2,000 years ago he was punched and beat and spat upon because of your sin today or this week, it still had to be paid for. And if you think about people saying, well, it doesn't really matter and he's saying it does matter, all it would do is stir up the wrath of God. For the non-Christian, we say, Romans Chapter 2, you're storing up wrath for yourselves for the day of God's wrath because you're an impenitent person. You're not repentant. "Well, I am repentant and I'm forgiven. I'm a card-carrying kingdom citizen." Well, that may be great, but you realize that your sin, even if you were to march out into the camp of the redeemed outside of Egypt, you may be a part of that covenant people, but you



do understand how that sin makes God react. He has to punish the sin. He has to punish sin in his Son.

Next verse. "Anyone," he thinks about those people in the desert, "who has set aside the law of Moses," they didn't do it, they broke the law, "dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses." They were capital offenses and they died for them. "How much worse then," in this new covenant age, "do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God?" The payment for sin they're acting like it doesn't matter, "and profane the blood of the covenant by which he's been sanctified." He's outraged, the Spirit of grace. We know him who said, if you think you are a Christian, then you know this one, don't you? Who said, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay?" "Yeah, but God repaid Christ instead of me." "And again, the Lord will judge," look at these two words, "his people. Oh, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God."

It's a fearful thing when my dad, who loves me in a covenant relationship of parental, you know, father-son relationship, even though that may be the case and I'm not being taken to the orphanage that day, it is a fearful thing when dad gets off the couch. I'm just saying the picture in the Scripture is there is a healthy, biblical, righteous fear of saying the thing that I hope will help me through my temptation this week is fearing the discipline of the Lord. Ananias and Sapphira didn't have any other chances to fear the Lord. But the whole Church feared the Lord and they feared the Lord because they just watched in a front-row seat, they watched the discipline of God upon his people.

Discipline begins with the household of God. He's willing, even in Corinth, to have people be chronically sick, fatigued and even die, and all of that is so the rest of the people can sit back and take note. All these things happen for our instruction. Learn from Ananias and Sapphira. Fear the discipline of the Lord.

Go back to our passage now in Acts Chapter 5. Remember this. Even though it's a very simple equation - they sinned, they died, the church feared. The discussion of the sin becomes quite informative. Look at verses 1 through 4. This Ananias and Sapphira sold the property, they liquidated that, they kept back part of it. They deceived to be considered more righteous than they were. Now verse 3, "Peter says, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart,'" wow, Satan, "'to lie to the Holy Spirit.'" Lie to the Holy Spirit? You're not lying to the Holy Spirit. You're just trying to be like Barnabas. You're hoping that the Church will see you as generous as Barnabas is seen. No, no, no. You're lying to the Holy Spirit, "and you kept back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, didn't it remain your own? After it was sold, it was at your disposal. Why is it that you've contrived this deed in your heart? You've not lied to man, but to God." Interesting now how the whole focus shifts before the punishment comes, before the discipline comes. Here is Peter going, "You know, you lied to the Spirit."

When people study this passage, certainly in their theology classes, they start looking at things like, wow, we see the personality of the Spirit here, you don't lie to a force, you lie to a person, Holy Spirit is a person, not a force. You see that he's equated with God. He didn't lie



to man, you lied to God. You just said you lied to the Spirit. The Spirit must be God, co-equal with God. You learn some things about the Spirit, the trinitarian, co-equal nature of the Godhead. All that's great. But that's not what we should be focusing on here, even though all of that is gleaned from this passage. What you ought to be focused on is that when you and I do something against each other, which in this case seemed like a victimless lie, God takes it seriously, his Spirit that he's made to dwell within us, the Spirit who functions in our church is being offended by the lies that we tell, by the things that we do that are sinful.

And therefore, let me shift a little bit from fearing the consequences of what God will do to what God feels, if I can put it that way. Number two on your outline, we ought to "Fear Displeasing God," and that's distinct from fearing his discipline. Fear displeasing him. Do you love God? If you love God, I want you to think about it. If you love God, do you love God? That means you care about God and what God feels, how he responds. "Well, I don't want him to be mad at me." That's not what I said. I want you to stop before you say "at me," I don't want God to be mad. And, you know, part of his anger starts with this. Jot it down, Genesis 6:6. It starts with grief. "It grieves the Lord to his heart," the Bible says, because of the sin of people. Sin grieves God. Do you care about that? Do you care about that? Do you care that what you did this week that was sinful grieved the God who made you and the God who redeemed you? You ought to care what he thinks.

As matter of fact in the New Testament, speaking of the Spirit, it says in Ephesians Chapter 4, "Do not grieve the Spirit of God, with whom you've been sealed until the day of redemption." God has put his Spirit within you, don't grieve him. Interesting to know how that paragraph starts. Here's how it starts. "Put away all falsehood, and do not lie to one another." Again, how easy is it for us to deceive people, to hold back information, to give them the wrong impression? The Bible says you should not do that, because one of the things that it does is it brings grief to God. Don't grieve God. If you love him, that should matter to you.

It's one thing for me to fear dad getting off the couch. One of the reasons my dad was there on the couch and it took him a long time to get off the couch is because of his job. He worked hard as a cop. That's a hard job. You're facing all the people that don't like you. And, you know, they knew my dad lived there and he'd drive his car there. And when he was working motors, he had a motorcycle there and they knew we lived there, and so they'd throw eggs at our house periodically. And, you know, they would say nasty things to me on the way to school. So they knew we lived there. There was a lot of vitriol against cops, not just now, but back then when I was growing up.

So it's one thing for me to fear him getting off the couch. But if I were doing things in that den and my brother and I were engaged in things that were like the things that were happening by the punks out on the street who hated my dad, if I now started to act like they acted, I should not just think what's dad going to do to me? I should think, what does that do to my dad? Do you see the difference?

You need to care, not only that he might discipline you, you need to care that it displeases him. Because even this very simple thing of lying, so that people will think I have a better



standing before the people of God than I actually do, you understand that in John Chapter 8, verse 44, when the topic of lying came up, he said, you know what? "When you lie, you're like your father, the devil. He's a liar. And he's been a liar from the beginning. When he speaks a lie, he speaks his native language." You don't think lying is a big deal? I understand that. And we don't think that, especially when there's no real victim in it, it's just someone's reputation, it's not a big deal. You may say things in a conversation that mislead people because you're just worried about what they might think of you and it may not seem like a big deal. But when you engage in those things, I want you to think those are the things engaged in by Satan. That's why Satan's name comes up in this passage. Why has Satan so filled your heart? He says the same thing to Sapphira in verse 9, "Peter says, 'How is it that you've agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?'" You've decided to do something that is offensive to him. You're trying his patience, which is more than just thinking about his anger. It's thinking about his displeasure.

I hope all of this can be said without you having fallen to the kind of the new reformational heresy that you can't displease God, you understand that, right? You understand the distinction between justification and sanctification. You do understand that even though it's a best-selling Christian book back in the day and in our recent generation, people love to think that you get straight A's from God no matter what because you're a Christian. Because you're under grace, because you're in Christ, you could not please God any more than you're pleasing him right now. And you couldn't please him any less than you're pleasing him right now. That is an absolute biblical heresy that does not square with the Bible.

When God says to the Thessalonians, you need to please God and please him more and more or passages about the people of God displeasing God, or if you think in this passage, this shows somehow that the people of God are pleasing the Lord. It's not the case. You can displease God today by what you do. And I want you to think about that. He'd like to be pleased in you. You'd like to hear well done, good and faithful servant. But the decisions that we make, what you ought to fear is just because you love this person, that you don't want to be like his enemies. Even deception, the Bible says, is just like his arch-enemy, which is purposed to destroy the people of God. I don't want to engage in that, and I don't think you do either.

If you want the blessing of God, I love the way it's put in Psalm 34. "Where is the person who desires life and loves many good days?" Well, if he wants to see good, well, then he better "keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit." And I know that every sin at some point intersects with deception, and if you don't have a concern about how God feels regarding your sin, then perhaps you need to have that Isaiah 6 experience of having an elevated view of God. Because the more holy he is in your mind, the more attractive this God is to you, the more you're going to hate your sin and hate displeasing him by your sin. Fear God's discipline, fear displeasing God, two distinct things. We all see them intertwined in this passage.

Then look right next to the third point that you've yet to fill in. Look at the verse there that I have noted. What is it? Verse 1a. "Well, Pastor Mike, you need to learn to count in order." I



understand this goes back to the very beginning. Verse 1a. Yeah. I don't even just want to say the first half of verse 1. "A" just means the first half, but here I just want to look at the first word. Now, I started by noting that we're contrasting Barnabas, a.k.a Joseph, with Ananias and Sapphira, that contrasting conjunction "but."

I'd like to stand back, though, and see that it's not just contrasting those two, it's contrasting everything that's gone before. I mean, in Chapter 1, things are going well. God is coming and giving a promise "Wait in Jerusalem, the Spirit's going to come." The Spirit comes. Everyone's like amazed. People get saved, the preaching goes forward. "No name given under heaven among men by which we must be saved." The opposition's being put down by courageous leaders as they power through the opposition. The Church is unified. The Church is good. Everything is advancing the whole mission of the Church, which is "be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth." Things are happening, man. People are getting saved. They went from 120 to 3,000 to 5,000 men plus, the Church is moving forward. People are submitting to the lordship of Christ. And that contrasting conjunction in verse 1. It's a contrast not just to Joseph, it really has us step back and say that's a contrast to all the good forward momentum we had. It's like moving forward down the field and all of a sudden the flag is thrown and now we get set back several yards.

Here's something the Bible's often concerned about, how the non-Christians view us, because if the non-Christians view us poorly and we give them reason, to use biblical phrases, for the Gentiles to blaspheme us, it hurts our mission. Our mission is to represent Christ and his lordship in the world. What I don't like about this passage is we're taking a step back. People have reason here to now mock the Church because they're full of the same kind of hypocrisy, though in a smaller form, they don't look like Pharisees, but the seeds and the leaven of the Pharisees is now among them. This is not a good sign and it does give the Gentiles reason to blaspheme.

I hope that as you're fighting temptation, you not only say I'm afraid of the discipline of God, I'm afraid of displeasing God, but number three, I want you to "Fear Detracting From Our Mission." Number three, fear detracting from our mission. I don't want to set the mission back. Because you know what? The CEOs all over South Orange County can do things in their lives personally, and unless it's really egregious and super illegal, it's not going to make the papers and people are not going to be talking about it. Maybe the people in the company, but most people don't care. That happens in a Christian organization, happens in a Christian church, if that happens in a Christian ministry, a Christian school, a Christian university, the people of this society cannot wait to pounce on them. Even that statement that I think you're thinking of in Romans Chapter 2, that because of sin, the Gentiles blaspheme, that came from the book of Ezekiel during the Babylonian captivity where Ezekiel is saying this is the problem with you sinning and going into exile, even though it's going to be over. When you went into the doghouse for 70 years, we gave the Gentiles a reason to blaspheme us.

It's important that we don't derail our mission. Why was that so important, why was Ezekiel so concerned about how the Gentile nations viewed them? Well, because the whole point of Israel going into the Promised Land in the beginning in Joshua was so that they could be a



stark contrast to the people who they were displacing. Do not be like the Canaanites, do not practice their abominable acts, do not reflect the idolatry of the Canaanites. You're going to kick them out. I've had enough. God got off the couch for an entire group of people called the Canaanites. Now he says, "Hey, Israel, go in there and be a beacon of light, live righteously, do the right thing."

And they go in and God, just without even lifting a finger hardly, the whole fortress of the middle of this nation and the capital city of Jericho, it flattens and they're all like, "Wow, God's with us. It's awesome." And then they go to a little city called Ai and Joshua goes, "Hey, we don't even need to send all the troops, just go and take the little city. We'll move on. We'll continue this divide and conquer strategy and it won't be any problem." Well, they go there and they get wiped out. Israeli soldiers have to be buried. And Joshua with the elders come before God, they lay on their face, they're weeping, they're mourning, they're crying, "God, why, why, why?" And God says, "Get off your face and go deal with the problem.". What's the problem? Somebody among you has taken the banned items.

Matter of fact, in the Septuagint, you know what the Septuagint is? The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, third century B.C. The heading in that, at least some of the copies of that, it has at the top a word that is the keyword used in Acts Chapter 5 about Ananias and Sapphira keeping back part of their sale. They "kept it back," that word. It's the word that heads the section in Joshua where a man named Achan and his wife, they go in, Achan does, and he takes the banned items. He doesn't take the Ferraris. He doesn't take the mobile homes. He doesn't take the Lamborghinis. He just takes a few things from the valet, you know, takes a Rolex or he takes a wallet or some pearls out of some dresser, so to speak. He brings some small things, hides them under the tent, says to his wife, "Shhh, just, it's OK." And she goes along with it. They hold back things that were supposed to be dedicated to the Lord and they came out and said, "Yeah, that was good. We wiped out that group of people there, awesome." They took some banned items in Jericho and God said, you're not going to win. We're not moving forward. We're set back now. You got a flag on the play, back 15 yards. You now have to deal with the problem.

So God identifies Achan and his family and he says, "You've got to go out, capital offense." "What? A capital offense for taking a couple of wristwatches and some jewelry? I mean, really?" Yeah, really. Why? Because you're starting this movement, this whole thing that we're going to complain about a thousand years later that you did not do it. I'm going to start at the beginning by making a strong point and that is you got a mission here. Don't derail it. You're supposed to be godly. Oh, it's just the seeds of what the Canaanites. They're all about money. They're all about materialism. They're all about idolatry. I don't even want you stealing the small stuff here. Achan has to be dealt with and he gets dealt with in a major way, capital offense for stealing a few things. I mean, shoplifting and they're executed. I mean, this is crazy. It's not crazy. Why? Because God is saying don't derail your mission.

A generation before that, they're coming out of Egypt. They had no worship center. God uses Moses to construct the worship center. Here's what it's got to be, here are the dimensions. Here's how you do it. Now I'm going to pick a group of people who are going to spiritually lead



you and they're called the priests, the sons of Aaron. And they're going to lead you. You know what, I want them to do this right. And it's going to be the leadership team for the spiritual lives of the Israelites from now on.

So all the instructions are set up and Aaron puts two guys in there called Nadab and Abihu, his family, his sons. And they say, "Great, we'll do that" and they do, except not exactly. They compromise a little bit. We don't know exactly what happened. It just says they burned strange fire on the altar before the Lord. And God said, "Well, you know what? You cut corners. And I know throughout the history of the priest, priests are going to cut corners and they're not going to drop dead. But the first two are going to drop dead. Because I want them to always remember, though I don't get off the couch immediately, immediately when sin happens, I feel the same way."

I mean, the norm should be to a holy God that every time we sin, sinners drop dead, but they don't. But at the beginning of the priesthood, don't forget the mission of the priesthood. At the beginning of the conquest, don't forget the purpose of this nation. At the beginning of the Church, don't forget what the Church is about. He shows strong, immediate discipline so that every generation after that, within the Church, within the priesthood or within the nation of Israel, they would know. God cares about holiness.

So you and I need to say we've got a job to do, The holiness of the Church has to be in place if we're going to effectively call people to submit to the lordship of Christ. Do you submit to the lordship of Christ? How in the world can we claim, hey, get in and follow Christ, if we're not faithfully following Christ? God's calling is for us to not derail our mission and it will set our mission back. People don't want to listen to our evangelism if we're not, as it says in Titus 2 and First Timothy 6, we have to "adorn the gospel." We have to give them no reason to detract from our message.

Do you really want to look in the mirror and think I'm the reason people are saying bad things about the people of God? Because they'll jump on it and it won't be fair, I understand it won't be fair, because they have all kinds of stuff on their side of the street, but when it happens on our side of the street, I mean, that's a big deal. Why? Because they know we're trying to proclaim a message of holiness. We're trying to tell people to follow Christ. And they love pointing out what a hypocrite you are. I don't think that's their fault, Jesus said they are looking for a reason to dismiss our message, if you're detracting from our mission.

If you grew up in church, one of the first verses you probably learned was, Romans 6:23. Romans 6:23? Think about it. Even if you don't know the reference, you know the verse, you can finish it for me, "the wages of sin is... death." OK. I know we've learned that. I mean, about 75% of you just said it out loud, the wages of sin is death. My question this morning is do you believe that? Because if you believe that what you need to be impressed with is the exception of him NOT doing that when we sin. Not, "Oh, I don't like Acts Chapter 5. I don't like that passage in Leviticus. I don't like what happened in Joshua 9. I mean, God seems so mean." No, no, no, no. God's being so gracious when he doesn't do it to you last Thursday. That's the amazing thing. How is it that God does not reflect his holiness in your life and mine



by killing us, literally grounding us for life when we do something that offends the holy God who made us and redeemed us? If the things I'm doing are like shooting arrows into his Son, if I'm there pushing the Roman soldier's arm into the face of Christ, how is it that I'm not struck dead when I do that by my sin? Because God is gracious. What should surprise us is the grace of God, not the discipline of God.

A couple of weeks ago, I was gone when Dr. Mounce was here, I was preaching in Philadelphia. I think I mentioned that last week and I didn't tell you though I was sent out there to teach on a book I wrote a couple of books back on parenting. So they wanted me to come out and preach on that, I preach and did a workshop. As I got done with the workshop, when I started to get into the weeds of what it is to be a parent and things that God says we ought to do. And of course, I'm looking at Hebrews Chapter 12 and trying to exposit that and talk about what that means. God is a disciplinarian and parents discipline us and God disciplines us. And this is a pattern even for our parenting.

I did all that and I got done and this guy comes up and he's mad, he did not like what I said. I know that's super hard for you to believe that someone didn't like what I say, (audience laughing) but he did not like what I said. He was roaring. I mean, he was just angry. Matter of fact, he kind of got it started, we finally went out because something else was happening in the auditorium after that. So I'm in the lobby with him and he's just going at me. "I think you're wrong, I think your view of God's wrong. I don't think God's a disciplinarian like you're saying. It's just God is about love and his grace and his goodness."

So I ask him a question, and I wasn't trying to be condescending or rude, and it was just kind of natural, it just came out of me. I said, "Have you read the Bible?" I wasn't trying to be snarky, I just like... And he looked at me like offended, like, "Well, of course, I've read the Bible," and his voice is loud at this point. "Of course I've read the Bible." And again, it just came out. I wasn't being snarky. I just said, "Have you read all of it?" And he responded to me like I'd ask him if he'd run a marathon. It was like, "Well, no, come on, I haven't read all of it." Well, you knew what my assignment was after that, right?

I think before you knock what I'm saying about the character of God and how he responds to his people, that that should become a pattern for how we deal with our kids, at least in terms of our discipline and our consistent consequences for misbehavior, I think you ought to read the whole book. I mean, you know, you're going to find a few things in there that are going to kind of support my argument here.

And it's funny how that came out so naturally when he was arguing about something that was so basic and fundamental to who God is, because I'm so used to and conditioned by the people at Compass Bible Church, and thankful and I'm grateful for that, I mean, most of us here read through the Bible every single year. I mean, you've been here at Compass Bible Church and I hope you have been prompted and spurred on to read the Bible. If you've been here six years, you've read it through cover to cover six times. Here's a guy arguing with me about the nature of God who hadn't read through it once.



And all I'm telling you is the goal of studying the Bible, especially verse by verse, passage by passage, chapter by chapter, is to make sure we get the whole council of God. If I'm a topical preacher, just hitting this and hitting that, I mean, I don't think I would ever say, "You know what South Orange County needs in 2020, a series on the fear of God. That'll be helpful." I don't think that's going to play well in my study when I'm thinking about kind of how to boost the good feelings of Compass Bible Church and get the budget up a little bit. I mean, the fear of God is not it. And yet that's exactly what this next passage deals with.

And not just this passage, the rest of Chapter 5, even in Chapter 6. So bear with me here for the next five sermons as we deal with what the Bible has to say about a God who would have his people stand back and say, "Whoa, I know how God really feels and he shows it when he deals with his people like Nadab and Abihu, Achan and his wife, and Ananias and Sapphira. And even if you're not the one making the sales transaction, when Sapphira was called in and given a chance, "Tell me about your husband here. Tell me about the price. Tell me what happened." She goes, "Oh, yeah, yeah." She could have said, you know, my husband, she could have been Abigail, and said, you know, "Nabal? Yeah, I don't know." "Ananias, he's trying to pull one over on you."

This is the Peter who told wives to submit to their husbands. He does not want the wife to submit to her husband at this point. Do not go along with this. Achan's wife should have said, "Dude, he hid it under the carpet, man." That is not what we should be doing. We got to love God enough to fear displeasing him, we need to respect God enough to fear his discipline. We've got to care about our mission and our neighbors and love this world enough to say, "Hey, we don't want to derail our mission. What we're called to do." May this unpreached part of Scripture, in many cases, may it motivate us this week to fear the Lord as we ought.

Let's pray. God, we are grateful for your grace and your forgiveness. Ultimately, when we think about eternity, but even in the short run, as we think back about the mercy that you've withheld discipline from us at times when we deserve to be exposed and we deserve to be disciplined, we deserve to be even as they were in Corinth, weak and sick and even dead because of our sin. So help us, please, to take sin more seriously, as the early Church learned and great fear came upon the whole Church and everyone who heard these things. Make that simple reminder from Acts Chapter 5 change the way we deal with our temptations this week.

In Jesus name. Amen.