**Grace to You** :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

**Purging Sin from the Church**
Scripture: Acts 4:32-5:11
Code: 80-142

The Bible is brutally honest in its recording of redemptive history. It records without hesitation the blemishes and the faults of God's people, as well as their strength and virtue. We look back and remember Moses, for example, who's righteous defiance of Pharaoh caused him to be the instrument by which Israel could be led out of Egypt. But the Bible also records his unrighteous defiance of God that barred him from ever entering the promised land himself. And then there is that story of David that is so profound, so moving. David, courageous, victorious. His triumphs in battle cover the pages of the Old Testament. But along with them, the Bible tells of his utter cowardice before the Philistine king of Gath, where he was absolutely humiliated.

The Psalms reveal David the saint, but in 2 Samuel 12, Nathan confronts him as David the adulterer and David the murderer. Proverbs records the heights of Solomon's wisdom, and then he believed the Ecclesiastes records the depths of Solomon's despair. And there is Elijah, who conquered hundreds of false priests and slew them, and then ran in fear from one woman. Elijah, who stood for God in the test of Mount Carmel. And then in fear and doubt and anxiety, asked God to relieve him from the pressure by killing him, when he sat alone in the wilderness. And so the record goes.

And then there is the beloved Apostle Paul, who writes that our speech is always to be gracious and seasoned with salt and always designed to minister goodness to others, who shouts at the high priest, God smite you, you whited wall, and shows that he was angry and violated his own principles of speech. And so I say the Bible is brutally honest when it deals with the blemishes of God's people. And so it is in the text that I draw to you this morning, the fifth chapter of Acts. Open your Bible there, if you will.

Up to this point in the Book of Acts, everything has been good. Luke's report has been all positive. But here in chapter five, for the first time, we confront the sins of the saints. For the first time, we see sin in the church. Now, remember, the early days of the church's history were bright, happy days, exhilarating days of Christian love and fellowship. Miracle days, days of healings, days of resurrections. The joy was overwhelming. The love was all-embracing and all-inclusive. Humility was everywhere. Sacrifice was taking place all the time. There was a deep commitment to the Apostle's Doctrine, to the power of the Holy Spirit. Evangelism was the all day enterprise of every believer. The results were explosive, so that, perhaps, 20,000 people have named the name of Jesus Christ in the city of Jerusalem by the time we reach this fifth chapter.

To be sure persecution has already begun, the enemy, Satan, endeavoring to head off this explosive movement in the name of Jesus Christ, that was winning so many to faith, moved in with persecution. But persecution turned out to be like pouring gasoline on a fire. Like fanning the flames. God was real, Christ was alive. The Spirit had come. Power was surging through the people. Praying was moving mountains. Boldness was everywhere, and more and more were being added to the church daily.

And you know something? The world had never seen such days. Never. For now the Messiah had come, and He had died to take away the sins of the world. And He had risen from the dead on the third day. Sins were forgiven. Full fellowship with God was now available to symbolize when the veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom and the holy of holies was thrown wide open. New natures were being implanted in believers, and the Holy Spirit, who had been with them, was now in them, and there was a level of power and strength, for triumph over sin and temptation, and for boldness in ministry that had never been known. This was a new age. This was the age of the New Testament. This was the new covenant. This was the age of the Holy Spirit.

Satan was active. He had tried his persecution and it failed miserably. In fact, the fire was too hot and it only got hotter. Believers were too strong and it only made them stronger. They were too bold and it only made them bolder. And so, Satan knew that you can't put pressure on the external. It only fans the flames. You've got to go to the fire and get it at the base. And so he invaded the church.

And here we are in the fifth chapter of Acts, face to face with the first recorded Satanic invasion of the church. The first recorded incident of sin made public in the church, and it is the heartbreaking text that initiates for us the long history of the church and its battle with internal inequity. Here we are, long after this incident, nearly 2,000 years later, battling sin incessantly in the church. It is the plague which is still there. It is the disease which is still there. It is the crippler which is still there. And sometimes, it even destroys and kills the church. The sins of the saints.

And though the message this morning is but brief, so that we have time to share at the Lord's table, I am praying that God will cause this message to burn into your hearts, the seriousness, the folly, and the far-reaching damage of the sins of the saints. This passage, as I noted a moment ago, also demonstrates for us the stubborn honesty of the Spirit of God. It was the author of Scripture. God could have painted the picture perfectly, more in favor of the church, and left out the flaws. But God never presents an untrue picture of anything, and never wants to give us an unrealistic expectation of what should happen. The church is not perfect. It's not intended to be perfect. It is a hospital for the spiritually sick, who know they're sick. We're not here because we think we're well, we're here because we know we're sick. The church is not what Henry Knox Sherrill once said, when he said, "The church is a nice, clean refrigerator, designed to keep a few select souls from spoiling." That is not the church. The church is imperfect, always has been.

Those of you who have read English history, no doubt have been fascinated by Cromwell. Once a painter was commissioned to paint the portrait of the great Cromwell. And Cromwell, as you may remember, was disfigured by many warts on his face, and was, to put it mildly, quite ugly to look at. The painter, hoping to please Cromwell, left all the warts out of the portrait. When it was delivered to Cromwell, he saw the painting. Biographer records, quote, he said, "Take it away and paint it the warts."

The Bible always paints the warts. Reality. And frankly, as disheartening and discouraging as that reality is, at the same time, it is somewhat encouraging. I mean, isn't it nice to know that right there in the very beginning, in the first few years and the pristine joys and glories of the brand new church, infused with miracle apostolic power and the might of the Holy Spirit healing the sick and raising the dead and causing multitudes to bow the knee and face the Christ? In the great early years, isn't it somewhat comforting to know that they were dealing with sin?

At least it dispels the illusion that if we could ever get back to being a real New Testament church, we wouldn't be having to deal with sin. No, not so. And wasn't it Paul who said the biggest pain in his life was not the scourgings he had, not the beatings with rods, not the shipwrecks, not the stonings, but the biggest pain he had was the concern for all the what? Churches. And there wouldn't have been such a pain if it wasn't for sin. And Paul talks about this in so many of his epistles, and occasionally, even names the people who are the biggest pain, the sinners.

Sometimes he's general, like in Romans 16:17. He says, "I urge your brother and keep your eye on those who cause dissentions and hindrances, contrary to the teaching which you've learned, and turn away from them, for such men are slaves. Not of our Lord Christ, but of their own appetites and by their smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." He was always worried about that in the church. He could never seem to get away from it. There were always such people corrupting the church.

He wrote to the Corinthians, "Beware those people who are carnal, who are so fleshly they can't be told the deep things." He told the Galatians, "Watch out for those people who having begun in the Spirit think they can be perfected through legalism." He told the Ephesians, "Watch out for those people who don't walk worth of the calling to which they are called." He told the Philippians, "Make sure you get your act together, submitting yourselves humbly in love to one another, looking not on your own things, but on the things of others." He told the Colossians, "Don't you be led astray by those who come with empty philosophy and human deceit." Make sure you lay aside, Chapter 3, all the sins, all those parts of your former life and live that resurrection life.

He was always dealing with sin. Sometimes, specific people such as Euodia and Sintakey. Sometimes, he warned in general. But the burden was always on his back, the struggle with sin in the

church, and it starts right here in Acts 5, the sad plague of the sins of the saints, and it is in sweet contrast, I might say, to the beauty of the church. It is the bitter, as compared to the sweet. Let me show you the beauty of the church by having you go back with me for a moment to verse 32 of Chapter 4. And the congregation of those who believed, as I said, could number into the 20,000's. The congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul. There is the first thing that we know about the church. There was a real unity. There was a genuine oneness. We could call it a sole partnership. This church was real. They were all genuinely linked by a common eternal life, and they were experiencing the blessing and the joy and the power of unity.

The Greek text literally says the heart and soul of those who have become believers was one. They were literally living out Paul's prayer in Philippians 1:27, that you would conduct yourselves that he would hear of you, that you were standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel. They were doing just that. They had the power of unity.

Secondly, they were marked by strong preaching. Verse 33 says, "And with great power, the Apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." There was a powerful emphasis on the Word of God, the truth of God, and particularly the Gospel of Christ involving the resurrection, and they were preaching the resurrection. In other words, they were not only enjoying internal unity, love and fellowship, but they were evangelizing with a passion. They were too busy, frankly, caring for one another in love and too busy evangelizing the loss to waste their energy, to consume their time with selfish pursuits, with bickering, with idle gossip, with criticism, with divisiveness, self-will, self-glory. They were consumed with love and evangelism. Because of this, there was a powerful grace upon them. The end of verse 33, "Abundant grace was upon them all."

What does it mean? God was just pouring out His favor. Just pouring out His blessings. Just dumping it on them. This is, of course, an ideal environment for the church. Passionate internal love and passionate external evangelism. Loving one another and loving the lost. Meeting the needs of one another and meeting the desperate need of the lost, which is to hear and believe the Gospel. There they were, swept up in the fire of those passions, and God was just pouring blessing on them.

And then from that general sense, we can look at one particular that Luke wants us to focus on. Look at the second half of verse 32. To show you how devoted they were to one another, not one of them claimed that anything belonged to him, but all things were commonly held. That's literally what the text says. Nobody claimed that anything belonged to him, but all things were commonly held. You say, "Is that Communism?" No. Communism says you take everything, throw it in one pot, and divide it up equally. That's not what this says. It simply says that what people possessed, they didn't hold as if it belonged to them, but as if it was common to everybody, so that whoever needed it, got it. That was the attitude. You can tell when the love runs deep and when the humility runs deep and when selflessness runs deep. It's when nothing that you hold is yours. You simply manage a divine asset and have to use it where it is most needed.

That gets fleshed out in verse 34 and 35, "For there was not a needy person among them." Amazing. Why? "For all who were owners of land or houses." That tells you, by the way, they didn't pool everything. People still owned things. They were still the owners of land and houses. There were still the haves and the have-nots. There were still the rich and the poor. But those who were the owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the Apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. When somebody had a need, somebody sold something. It wasn't that they just gave out of their salary or their wages or what they could earn. It wasn't they gave out of their surplus. It was that they actually liquidated their assets, took the money, and put it at the Apostles' feet. That's how they used to take the offering in those days. The Apostles would stand in the front and everybody would parade by and lay it at their feet. And they would bring it and put it there so that the needs of others could be met. I mean, the love was so hot, there was such a warmth of fellowship, there was so much sacrifice and so much real humility and so much moving of the power of the Spirit of God, who had shed the love of God abroad in their hearts, that nobody held anything as if it was their own. You simply managed it as an asset for the kingdom's sake and it belonged to whoever needed it most. And that tells us how deep the love ran.

And Chapter 4 closes with a specific illustration of this kind of devotion. Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, that is born on the island of Cyprus, who was also called Barnabus, which is how we know him. The Apostles gave him that name, which, translated, means "Son of Encouragement." Tells you a little bit about the kind of person he was. It says in verse 37, he owned attractive land, which is just an interesting note, because Levites, you remember, were not allowed to own land. This is another indication of the end of the old covenant, the externals of the old covenant having passed away. Barnabus owned attractive land.

It must have been quite a wonderful thing for a Levite to have such. It demonstrated the liberation that he enjoyed in the new covenant, that he didn't hold to it tightly. Verse 37 says he sold it and brought the money and laid it at the Apostles' feet. This is great generosity. Most people have their future tied up in their fixed assets, isn't that true? You don't want to sell your house and give all the money away, cause then you sort of have to live by real faith, you know?

And you've got something else stocked over here. You've got your stockpile, your land or your stock or whatever it is, and we all fall into that pattern of building up assets to solidify our future and hedge against what inevitabilities could come. And that's not all bad, by the way. But when there are people around us who have need, and we have what we don't currently need, we see the pattern here of considering that it really belongs to all of us, and we're willing to give it up to those who need it most, and that's what marked this church, and that's what is demonstrated by this man called Joseph, later known as Barnabus.

And he didn't have to put strings on it. He just put it at the feet of the Apostles and said, "You use it as you wish." The spiritual stewardship is discharged when I give it, but now it's your stewardship, to use it in a way that honors God. That was the kind of church the early church was. And we'd all like to belong to that, wouldn't we? Powerful, miraculous, devoted to the sound doctrine and teaching of the Apostles, loving, unselfish, humble, generous. What a magnificent picture.

You reach the heights of the sweetness at the end of Chapter 4, and you step right into the bitterness in the first verse of Chapter 5. And the backdrop of Chapter 4 is most important if you're going to understand the heinousness of the sins of the saints that come immediately in Chapter 5.

You remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira, don't you? The certain man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge. And bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the Apostles' feet. Now, beloved, just to give you a parallel, the story of Ananias and Sapphira is to the Book of Acts what the story of Akin is to the Book Of Joshua. In both cases, an act of deceit interrupted the victorious progress of the people of God.

Verses 1 and 2, which I just read to you, indicate to us the sinful pretense. You say, "What's the sin?" The sin is not that they didn't give everything. God never commanded them to give everything. That's not the sin. The sin is not that having given this, they should have given more. God never game them any prescription that they should give a certain amount. The sin here is the sin of deceit. In a word, hypocrisy. You get the scenario, don't you? There is this explosive love in the early church, and people are just coming down at the offering time and not just putting down, you know, a five or a ten or a twenty or whatever, in our parleys, they're dropping down the proceeds from the sale of a house or the sale of land, and just putting it there and going back to their seat. And the joy and the exhilaration and the spiritual devotion is apparent to everybody.

And here comes Barnabus, this man who became beloved and was known as the Son of Encouragement, and he puts it down, and you can just hear the murmur go through the crowd and they say, "What a godly man. What a generous hearted man. What a devout man he is." Well, Ananias and Sapphira would like a little of that prestige. They want to cash in on the opportunity to be admired. And they want to put on a public show. And so they parade down there, and the pretense is that they're giving everything that they got for the sale of the property. That's the pretense. And it is apparent, as you shall see from the text, that they had made some public claim to that effect, that they had actually told people they were going to sell their property and give all. That was the issue. They sought to gain prestige, to be thought of as godly and sacrificial and generous and they wanted to be applauded for their great sacrifice and hang on to a little cash at the same time.

Hypocrisy, then, listen to it carefully. Hypocrisy is the dirty sin that Satan wanted to use to corrupt the church, to put out the fire at the base, and it's the first sin the Bible chronicles in the life of the church,

and to this day, my friend, it is a killer sin. It is still the best way to douse the flame at its heart. Hypocrisy. God hates this sin, and no sin is so ugly as that one that attempts to paint spiritual beauty where there is none. And when such people get into the church, they corrupt it, and when they get into the leadership of the church, they can even kill it, because Satan can be in control.

Fortunately, however, for the church, and true to what we would expect from God, who hates sin, this terrible, sinful pretense gave way to spiritual perception. And God revealed what was going on to Peter, verse 3. But Peter said, and he would have only known this by way of direct revelation from God, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" Peter recognized that Satan was in this deal. "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?" The lie was you said you were going to give it all and you didn't. You lied to the Holy Spirit. I don't want to digress on this, but that is serious enough. That is serious enough in itself to warrant what's going to happen. You better be careful what promises you make to the Holy Spirit. Pretty serious. People who made vows to God in the Old Testament that didn't keep them often what? Died? I hear a lot today about promise keeping. It makes me nervous. I did a little inventory back over my life to see if I could remember any conscious promises to God that I vowed publicly, and I could only come up with one, and that was to stay with my wife. That's the only time I ever stood in public and made a vow to God and swore that I wouldn't violate it.

Now, I'm not staying with her because I'm afraid of God. Frankly, I like her. But I'm afraid of God too. And so, between God and her, I'm there. But you can't be running around fast and loose, making vows to God that you don't intend to keep. That's a pretty high level of hypocrisy. Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back some of the price of the land?" Well, it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? You didn't have to sell it. God didn't tell you to sell it. And after it was sold, was it not under your control? You didn't even have to give it all. Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart. Here's the deed, you have not only lied to men, but to God. You stood up and made a pretense that you were going to give it all in order that you might gain the favor from men, and perhaps in order that you might impress God. And you not only lied to men, you lied to God.

And on the surface, you might say, "Well, that's definitely wrong to do that. Doesn't seem as serious as some sins." But spiritual perception gives away immediately the swift punishment. Look at verse 5. "And as he heard these words," by the way, he never said anything. He never had a chance. "Ananias fell down and breathed his last." He just fell over dead, right in front of the church. That's a pretty shocking thing to happen, and I've always wondered what the offering was like the following Sunday. I think it was probably up. Ananias fell down and breathed his last. Died. He was dead. God killed him. And verse 5 says, "Great fear came on all who heard of it." Sure. And you know what they thought? They thought this. That's a bunch of serious people in there, who have a serious God. And what they're serious about is sin. Not exactly what you would call a seeker-friendly environment. Certainly not a sin-friendly environment. Fell dead, and great fear came on everybody.

That's the kind of testimony the world should have. I don't want to digress on that point, simply to make it. The message we should be sending to the world is not that we tolerate sin, but that we don't. And that we preach that there is, by the grace of God, a means for complete forgiveness. That's the message. We would like the world to know that sin is a killer, and we have a message of forgiveness.

Well, the Jews couldn't let bodies hang around because they didn't embalm them. They always buried them the same day. Basically, tradition said within three hours, and so, verse 6 says, "The young men arose and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him." Out he went, and into the ground. And then I love this verse 7. "There elapsed an interval of about three hours." That's about the time that normally was required that the body be buried. And there, out there, it took them three hours to dig a hole to put him in.

Now, get this. He's gone to church, he's done his little deal, he's dropped dead and he's already buried before his wife arrives. It says after an interval of three hours, his wife came in. Now, the first thing that I must impress upon you is that gives us some idea of how long church lasted. You understand that? When times were not so carnal. Church lasted a long time. Wonderful. I can only imagine how long sermons were. She's three hours late for church. How can you be three hours late for church? I mean, no roast and no hairdo could require three hours. The only thing I can assume is she wanted to make a grand entry. And she made one. She doesn't even know what happened. She walks in, her husband's already in the ground.

Peter responded to her when she came in, imagine, just calling her, tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price. Whoa. And she thought maybe this was her moment, and she's going to be commended. And she says, "Yes, that was the price." Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the spirit of the Lord to the test? Why have you tempted God with your hypocrisy?" Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door and they'll carry you out as well. Welcome to church, Mrs. Ananias. Brother. The guys are just walking in after burying her husband, and they're about to carry you out, Peter said. And she fell immediately at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead and carried her out and buried her beside her husband. It's not exactly what those guys expected that Sunday, to spend six hours burying two people.

Verse 11, you go from sinful, this pretense, the spiritual perception to swift punishment, to solemn purging. Verse 11, "A great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things," and that takes you back to the end of verse 5, "Great fear came on all who heard of it." Listen, God is not playing church. Two immediate things I would like to note for you. This was really a blessing to Ananias and Sapphira, was it not? Where do believers go when they die? Heaven. So they - all they knew, they went to church and ended up in Heaven. You day, "Well, wasn't this punishment on them?" No, not so much on them. There was certainly a punishment to it, obviously.

The first thing you have to realize is that God and His mercy and His grace may take the life of a believer to get him out of the way, because he's a problem to the church. After all, remember in 1 Corinthians 11, "Some who came to the Lord's table came in an unworthy manner." And that's why some were weak and some were sick and some were dead.

In 1 John 5:16, John writes that there are some sins you don't need to pray for, because they are the sin that we could call the sin, the straw that breaks the camel's back. There's no point in praying for them, because they're a sin unto death and God's going to get them out of there before they corrupt His church. They're not going to lose their salvation, like the men in 1 Corinthians 5, the flesh may be destroyed, but the soul will be saved. So, for them, it's glory, but the message being sent here is that God is dead serious about sin. And while we might conclude by this, well, look, if you want a quick trip to Heaven, lie to the Holy Spirit, most of us have a normal enough approach to life and a desire to keep living, and a sense of preservation and a desire to be with those we love and to fulfill our role in this world, that death is an unwelcome invader. And in that sense, it did send a fear signal to the church, that if you want to keep living, you better make sure you deal with the sin in your life.

And it isn't like this was some monumental inequity, at least in the categories that we usually think of. This was somewhat of a small hypocrisy. But small hypocrisies are huge in Heaven. Huge. We would love people to think that we give sacrificially, when the fact of the matter is it's probably a hypocrisy. We don't give - we would love people to think that we are devout students of Scripture, when the truth of the matter is that most of our learning from Scripture comes because somebody else studies, not us.

We would love for people to think that we are lovers of communion with God and are committed to a devout prayer life, when the fact is most of our praying is done in public and often by someone else, and the private prayer place is small and brief. We would like people to think that we have this great love for the truth of Scripture, but our lives are filled with little hypocrisies of all kinds. All over the place, too numerous to even count, lest you think at some point in your life that you have classified yourself as somewhat near spiritual perfection because you are not committing sins that are overtly sins of commission. You've tried to omit the sins of omission, those things that you ought to do but don't do.

When you've covered those bases, then you still have to look and find all the little hypocrisies of your life, the little pretensions about prayer, Bible study, spiritual devotion, love to God, devotion to the Spirit of God, humility, sacrifice on the behalf of someone else, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Those sins that are known only to you and God. Those secret sins, down deep in the heart that could never be revealed unless an Apostle was there, like Peter, and God chose to reveal them. Those things, too, kill the purity and the power of the church and are of great consequence to God and to you.

What the story tells us is that God hates the sins of the saints, no matter how trivial they might be, and the sins that are most heinous in the church because they are most subtle and they put Satan in control and you don't know it, are the hypocrisies of the church. If somebody comes in and teaches false doctrine, that's easy to deal with. If somebody comes in and discounts the reality of the Trinity or attacks the person of Jesus Christ or assaults the deity of the Holy Spirit, or attacks things like humility and virtues we are well aware of, or comes against matters of prayer. Any of those things are recognizable. It's those subtle, little, devious deceptions that reign in all of our hearts. Those little favorite sins that we cherish that nobody knows about. The times that we play with God and pretend to be what we are not, those are the sins of the saints that destroy the church and those are the kinds of things that God wants to move against. God hates those sins. No sin is small, no sin is trivial in His eyes, particularly not a sin of deception, because a sin of deception is Satan controlled and you don't know it. No lies, then, are little white lies, and God has every right to punish every sin, because He wants His church purity, deserves it.

See, we can go to Matthew 18, when you know your brother is in sin, you go to him and you confront him about that sin. We can do that part, but who's going to discover those little deceptions that give Satan place in the fellowship? That's between you and your conscience. The message here sent to the church was the little deceptions are deadly. They have to be dealt with, and if you can't deal with them, maybe I'll deal with them. Great fear should come on the church about sin.

And then, additionally, great fear came upon everybody else in verse 5, in verse 11, everybody outside the church looked at the church and said, "Boy, that is a serious place. You better go in there serious. People die in there." And what are they serious about? Sin. That should be the reputation of the church across the world. Not that we are an entertainment center, not that we are a psychological boosting organization. Not that we're a place for family fun and fellowship, but that we are a place where God's dealing with sin. And He's bringing it into the light and He's forgiving it.

The sins of the saints still embattle the church, and the most subtle of all are those hypocrisies. That's one of the reasons, beloved, why we have this table. That's why we're here, to deal with these issues, so that the church can confront its own impurity, one on one, you on you and me on me, before God. And not eat and drink in an unworthy manner and compound our problem, because he that eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, Paul wrote. So, now is the time to look deep within our hearts and sort out those hypocrisies that steal the power of the church and the blessing of your own life and can bring upon you the chastening of God as He so wills.

Let's pray. Our Father, we come to you now with the recognition that even our hypocrisies are so deceptive that, apart from your Holy Spirit, they may be hidden in our own pride, our own spiritual pride so deeply that we can't even see them. And we ask that you would show them to us even now as we gather together to come to your table. We don't want to take the bread and the cup unworthily. We don't want to mock the death of Christ, who died for our sins. How can we celebrate that while

holding on to the very sin that put Him on the cross? Such hypocrisy. It's unworthy of any true believer.

And so, we want you to penetrate us with your spirit and find those hypocrisies in our lives. Help us willingly and eagerly and openly to realize the sin that is there and ask you to even take out the sin that we don't even recognize, and wash us and make us clean. Give us the fire, may it burn bright. May we have the love that that early church had. May we have the devotion to the proclamation of the truth. May we have the spiritual integrity, and oh, God, may you purge out the sins of the saints in more merciful ways than you did with Ananias and Sapphira.

But Lord, may you put the fear in us, as you did in that early church and in the surrounding community. We now prepare, Lord, by coming to You and asking for forgiveness and cleansing.

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