



Shepherd's Path

A Shepherd's Personal Devotions

The Early Church Series, Lesson 54

Lesson Title: The Look-On-The-Inside Church

Take Home Point: Don't put on an act to look good, but do good for Jesus.

Warm-Up:

How many times have we heard the story? A "doctor" who never went to medical school. A "war hero" who never saw combat. A professor's resume padded with degrees never earned or received. A "good Christian man" who is without mercy or compassion in relationships. In every case, the outward appearance is exposed as false to the true situation and the cry of "liar" and "hypocrite" is heard. Most of us are disgusted or at least disappointed when this happens, but truthfully, we should expect such things in a culture that bases so much of a person's value on appearances and social or economic standing.

Read: Acts 5:1-11

Observation (What happened?):

Who did Peter say Ananias and Sapphira were lying to in giving the gift they did?

Was it the money, or honesty, that was expected in the gifts believers brought?

Interpretation (What does it mean?):

What lessons do you think the believers learned from these events?

What other reactions besides being terrified might people outside the church have had?

Insight:

There's a word for a person who does something for the sake of appearance without a heart of integrity – hypocrite. Do you know the harshest words Jesus spoke were against hypocrisy? Read through Matthew 23 to get an idea of his perspective on the religious leaders of his time. Note that he did not condemn their action, but the false heart with which they did them. In Matthew 6, Jesus declares that hypocrites receive an earthly reward, not one from God. The deadliest poison the church faces is hypocrisy. It destroys reputations, relationships, churches, and opportunities for witness. It stunts the growth of Christians who practice it or who are misled by it. Non-believers overlook failure, sin, and even futility, but hypocrisy turns them away. We need to fight it with all our heart! A sincere heart that knows God's way and lives it from the inside out.

Application (What does it mean to me?):

What are some things you are tempted to do as a show of being religious? How do you resist those temptations?

How would your friends and family respond if asked whether you always demonstrate the same characteristics no matter what situation or setting you're in?