

proves the existence of a good coin. It is therefore the greatest folly to condemn the church because there are some unworthy members in it. Shall we never use money because it has been counterfeited?

3. *The sin of Ananias and Sapphira.* It is a very happy sight to find husband and wife walking together in that which is right, true and good; but it is a sad sight to find them confederates in sin, deception and fraud. No doubt Ananias was persuaded in his own mind that this sect had a great future before it, and wishing to share in the prosperity he threw in his lot with them, not wishing to seem to be behind other devoted and pious disciples who had disposed of their property and were vieing with each other in their generosity towards the poor, they disposed of their property but "*kept back part of the price.*" Their sin consisted in

(1) That they were ambitious for praise. They were anxious to be regarded as eminent disciples, when they knew they were not true disciples at all. They were possessed with an inordinate desire to appear well. So anxious were they to secure the honor and praise of their fellowmen that they were willing to offend God in order to obtain it.

(2) They were covetous. They clung to their gold. It may be that when they sold their possession they purposed to give all, but when they got the money in their hands their hearts failed them. They loved the money and thought it too much to give. This is a form of idolatry that is altogether too common even in this christian age. They were willing to hold their money at the expense of their virtue, selling their souls for gold.

(3) They were distrustful of God. They were afraid that they might come to want themselves and although now all things were common, it might not always be that there would be a common fund to draw from. They could not take God's word that they would be provided for, but thought they would play a wiser part and lay up a little for a dark day.

(4) There was hypocrisy. They made a pretense of godliness where none existed and claimed virtues they did not possess. Sin is always sinful, but in those making great professions of piety it is far worse than in others.

(5) There was deliberate wilful lying, both in word and deed. They had a perfect right

to keep their money, or any part of it, but they had no right to pretend that the gift they were giving was the whole price of their possession. A fact which aggravates this offence was that they had deliberately planned the whole matter. It shows a depth of hypocrisy and of hardness of heart when two persons plan together to lie, and pledge themselves to support each other in carrying out the falsehood. They lied to the Holy Ghost not only in that the offering was made to the church, the temple of the Holy Ghost, but in that it was made to God and was thus a direct falsehood addressed to God. "*Learn to hate and loathe a lie as vile, defiling the soul and offensive to God. Spurn lying of every kind—the little lie, the white lie, the lie of society, of trade, of convenience, the lie that conceals or covers up from those who have a right to know, the lie that exaggerates, the lie that tells half the truth.*"—*Illustrative Notes.*

4. *The punishment.* The punishment may seem severe, but we may rest satisfied it was just. Terrible as this divine judgment was, we cannot wonder that it should be inflicted, for it was done to maintain the honor of the Holy Ghost as lately poured out upon the church. It was a great insult to the Holy Ghost, implying that he could be imposed on, that he knew not the hearts of men. It was done, further, to check that kind of offence of presumption, now at the beginning of this dispensation. At times the greatest severity in punishment is the greatest mercy. The punishment of the guilty few, results in the good of the many. There seem to be special necessity why this sin should receive signal punishment. We must not forget that these people were members of the infant church which needs special care and training, lest it gets started in a wrong direction. The little society of christians had won public favor and the church had become very popular and there was danger that many would seek to join it who would hinder rather than help, being driven by a desire to float with the tide, while in reality they had no life in themselves. Ananias is dealt with severely now at the first, that while it is being manifested that it is a great blessing to receive the Spirit, there might be given a manifestation of the danger of despising the Spirit. There are abundant examples of severe punishment meted out to those who had sinned, namely: The worship-