

# Be sure your sin will find you out

Message for Sunday, April 19, 2015  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Acts 5:1-11

**Children's Message:** Matthew 22:15-22, the question about paying taxes.

In the news this past week, there was a story about a large group of teachers and school principals (in Atlanta, not around here!) who were found guilty of helping students cheat on their exams, in exchange for large sums of money. They had a whole system in place, with lots of people involved in the scheme. The judge sentenced many of them to spend time in prison.

*Question:* Why do people cheat? What do you think?

But what really happens: sooner or later, the truth comes out. Then they are in big trouble, much worse than getting a bad mark on a test.

This is what some people said to Jesus:

**“Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity.”**

Do you know what “integrity means? It’s describes someone you can trust, someone who is fair, someone who tells the truth, someone who is honest.

That’s the kind of person I want to be: a person of integrity. I want to be like Jesus. That’s the key: follow Jesus, focus on him in my life [*use a magnifying glass to show this*].

Remember that, if you are tempted—no, *when* you are tempted to cheat, to lie, to steal. Stay focussed on Jesus. Ask him to help you do the right thing.

**Sermon** “Be sure your sin will find you out”

## 1) If you're a Christian, live like one

If you or I were writing a family history, which would be shared publicly, we would be tempted to omit the parts that make our families look bad. Oh sure, it’s OK to put in amusing anecdotes about some little mistakes or embarrassing moments. But I likely wouldn’t include personal secrets, things that we’re ashamed about. Like this passage:

**Acts 5:1-2, New Living Translation:**

**There was also a man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property. He brought part of the money to the apostles, but he claimed it was the full amount. His wife had agreed to this deception.**

The account of Ananias and Sapphira is one of the passages which demonstrates the honesty of the Bible. Here we see the dirty laundry of the church, displayed for everyone to see. It would have been easy for the church leaders to edit out this particular passage. Perhaps they felt like doing that. I’m glad they didn’t.

I’m glad, because it tells me that there were imperfect Christians in the Church from the very beginning. We all know there are plenty of us today!

Does that mean that we excuse sin when it happens in the church? Do we gloss it over and say, “Oh, that’s OK. It’s no big deal.” Certainly not! The whole point of this passage is the *seriousness* of sin in the church.

**Acts 5:3-4, New Living Translation:**

**Then Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren’t lying to us but to God.”**

If it was simply a matter of someone cheating Peter out of some money, I imagine Peter would have shrugged it off. What’s a few dollars after you’ve been imprisoned and beaten for your faith? But this was a sin against God.

## 2) Be sure your sin will find you out

Let’s look at exactly what it was that Ananias and Sapphira did that was so wrong. Their sin was not being stingy. They could have kept the land for themselves. They could have kept all or part of the money for themselves. There was no law requiring these special offerings; people did it out of love. So there was nothing at all wrong in them keeping part of the money in their own pockets.

The problem was that they presented the money as if it was the full amount. They lied. And it wasn’t just other Christians they were lying to; they were lying to God.

I remember a Bible verse that I learned many years ago:

**Numbers 32:23, New Living Translation:**

**Be sure that your sin will find you out.**

That verse is very powerful for us today. We may think we can hide our sins. We may think we can get away with something wrong. The Bible says, “Be sure that your sins will find you out.” Sooner or later, the truth will come out.

Just about every week, we hear a news story of someone whose secret wrongdoing has been discovered. And that

doesn't include the things which happen in marriages and families. Those secrets can destroy relationships, careers, and reputations.

### 3) Sin is deadly serious

Acts 5:5-6, New Living Translation:

As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified. Then some young men wrapped him in a sheet and took him out and buried him.

Peter confronted Ananias with the blunt truth: he was a liar, and he had even tried to lie to God. Ananias was filled with shame, guilt and fear when he realized the magnitude of what he had done. Overcome with dread, he dropped dead on the spot.

A similar thing happened when his wife Sapphira came in (see verses 7-10).

Like I said a moment ago, these secret sins can ruin our relationships and reputations. But there's more: sin cuts you off from God. You see, sin isn't just a matter of hurting another person. Sin is *deliberately disobeying God*. When I sin, in effect I am saying to God, "Yes, I know that this is not what you want me to do. But I don't care about you. Just take a hike and leave me alone."

As I mentioned earlier on, sinful people have been part of the church from the very beginning. But God loves us too much to leave us like that. He gave us his Son to lead us into a new way of life. He gives us the Holy Spirit so that we will have power to follow that way. We may still be weak at times, and fall into sin. But we don't stay there. Our lives now have direction and purpose, and with God's help we get up and get going again. There's a huge difference there.

We don't have to die because of our sins. We can be forgiven. Our relationship with God can be restored. There is a deep, inner healing that takes place when we come back to God.

Some people think, "Hey, what a great deal! I can go and do something wrong, then turn around and say, 'God, please forgive me,' and everything's OK again. Fantastic!"

There is a problem with that way of thinking. The Bible tells us that God is always willing to forgive us when we repent and ask forgiveness. But it also warns us that if we keep on playing this kind of game, we will get to the point of not wanting to come back to God. It's a disease where we get "hard hearts:"

Hebrews 3:7-8, 12, New Living Translation:  
That is why the Holy Spirit says,

"Today you must listen to his voice. Don't harden your hearts against him as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested God's patience in the wilderness."

Be careful then, dear friends. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God.

Because if you harden your heart, you will lose your desire for God. And God will let you have your way:

Romans 1:24, New Living Translation:

So God let them go ahead and do whatever shameful things their hearts desired.

I read about a man to whom that happened. Philip Yancey is one of my favourite Christian authors. In one of his books, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, he tells of the time a friend of his, a man who attended the same church as Yancey, invited him out for coffee. The man—let's call him Daniel—said there was "something he wanted to talk about."

When they got there, and had ordered their coffees, Daniel dropped the bombshell. After fifteen years of marriage, he was leaving his wife. He had found someone younger, prettier, someone who "made him feel alive again." He and his wife were not incompatible; they didn't have serious problems. Daniel simply wanted a change, like a man who gets an itch for a newer model car.

Then Daniel put forward *the* question: "I know that what I'm doing is wrong. But after the divorce is final, and I'm married to my new wife, and we're settled down, will God forgive me?" Yancey wrote that "the question lay on the table like a live snake, and I went through three cups of coffee before I dared attempt an answer."

Finally, Yancey said, "Of course God will forgive you. But the danger is that you may not want forgiveness by then." And that's exactly what happened. Daniel went through with his plan. He says he's happy. But he left behind most of his friends who cared about him. And he left behind God. He hardened his heart. And God let him go.

Sin is deadly serious.

### 4) You can come back home

Maybe part of what I've said describes you today. You've lost interest. You've wandered away from God. But somewhere deep inside you feel that you'd like to

come back. You can, you know. You may have given up on God; but God never gave up on you. Even when he gave you the freedom to make a mess of things, he was still ready to receive you back.

Part of our human nature is that it's extremely difficult for us to say, "I was wrong. Please forgive me." That may be the hardest thing you'll ever do, but it's also the best thing you'll ever do. It's the first step on the road to healing and wholeness.

Jesus wants to welcome you back home:

**Mark 2:17, New Living Translation:**

**Jesus said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor — sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough."**

A woman was dying from AIDS. The nurse called for a priest to come and see her. The priest read the Bible, and prayed with her, seeking to comfort her, but it was no use.

"I am lost," she said. "I have ruined my life and every life around me. Now I'm going painfully to hell. There is no hope for me."

The priest saw a framed picture of a pretty girl on the dresser beside the bed. "Who is this?" he asked. The woman brightened. "She is my daughter, the one beautiful thing in my life."

"And would you help her if she was in trouble, or made a mistake? Would you forgive her? Would you still love her?"

"Of course I would!" cried the woman. "I would do anything for her! Why do you ask such a question?"

"Because I want you to know," said the priest, "that God has a picture of you on his dresser."

God loves you, too, no matter what has happened.

### **Next Steps:**

- If you are involved in anything wrong, confess it to God. *Now!* (Because if you wait until "the right time," you'll come up with excuses.)
- Turn your life back to God. Surrender to him, and ask his help to follow his way.
- Experience the joy of life with God!
- *Bonus:* If you have the privilege of being the one to welcome someone back to God, cherish that sacred opportunity.
- Read the rest of Acts 5, in preparation for next week.