

Study on Acts no.3

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Date: 21 April 1985

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the portion we read, the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 5, and we read at the beginning the story of Ananias and Sapphira, recorded for us in chapter 5, and deal with the first 16 verses of this chapter.

Now we resume again our studies night in the Acts of the Apostles, and we've noted that the Book of Acts is really a history of the extension of the Christian church from Jerusalem to Antioch and ultimately to Rome and from Rome throughout Europe.

The chief actor in all this drama is, of course, the Holy Spirit himself, whose power accompanied and used the Apostles in such a mighty way that the Christian church spread so rapidly.

So far there are no studies. We've had a look at the ascension of our Lord, as it is recorded in this chapter, in this book. We had a look at the great event of Pentecost when the Spirit came visibly. We had a look at the healing of the man at the beautiful gate of the temple, and then at the Sadducean persecution that arose from that, and the prayer life of the Christian church and the power of God that manifests itself in and through the church.

[1 : 50] Now the church of Jesus Christ, the New Testament church, as I said earlier, its history is here recorded for us.

And tonight, by way of tying up a few loose ends, I want to look with you, before coming to the story of Ananias and Sapphira, at the church and its nature, the church and its practice, the church and the qualifications that were necessary for entrance into it, and the church and the marks that distinguished it in the world in which it existed at that time.

You and I tend to speak of the church without really stopping to consider what we mean by the use of the term church.

I suppose that for many of us, the church just suggests to us a building of a certain kind in a certain place. But when the Bible or the New Testament in particular uses the word church, it uses it in a very different way.

It uses it in its spiritual sense. The church is essentially a body of people, a number of people, called by the grace of God from the service of sin, called out of the service of sin by the power of God, and by that same power called together to the worship of God.

[3 : 29] So it is a body or a number of people called out of a particular environment, a particular existence, and called into another environment and into another kind of existence.

That is the church that the Book of Acts speaks about and that the New Testament speaks about, a group of people. Now, this group of people, as we see them here in the Book of Acts, had certain qualifications necessary for entrance into the number.

You see, everyone in the days of the Acts of the Apostles, everyone wasn't a member of the Christian church. And the thing that the apostles required of candidates, if you want to use the word for entrance into the church, the things that they required were such as these, repentance, faith, and a confession of that faith.

You remember this is what happened on the day of Pentecost. Peter told them in answer to the question, what should we do? He said, well, what you have to do is really to be saved by the power of God. And you have to give evidence of that salvation in your life by repenting of your sin, believing in Christ, and confessing Christ as your Savior.

Now, this is what we require to this day in the Christian Reformed Presbyterian churches, and certainly in the evangelical churches. We require that people believe in Jesus as their Savior, that people repent of their sins and give evidence of that repentance in their life, and that they confess that the Christ who has changed their life is their Savior.

[5 : 19] And these were the things that were required before people could join the Christian church in exactly the same way as we have here today.

And then that church, that group of people, that body of people manifested that, showed to the world around it that it was different from the world.

The people who associated themselves with the church were different. And not only were they different in themselves, but in their practice, in the way they functioned in the world, they were quite different.

In chapter 2, for example, we read that these people continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. They continued in fellowship.

They continued in the breaking of bread and in prayer. Now, these are the marks of the Christian church. The great marks of the Christian church are these. People believe the Bible.

[6 : 19] That's the apostles' doctrine. For them, in those days, it was the teaching of the Old Testament as the apostles interpreted to them. For us, it is the teaching of the Old Testament interpreted for us by the New Testament.

And so the apostles' doctrine for us today is the whole Bible. And one of the great marks of the Christian church is that it believes the Bible. It continues to believe the Bible.

And the proof of that is that the church comes together visibly, corporately, formally, externally, as we are here tonight. Come together to dwell, to think about what the Word of God is saying and to learn together from the Word of God.

It is no mark of faith in the life of an individual. It is no mark of progression in faith when he or she absents themselves from the public gatherings of the church of Jesus Christ.

That is no mark of progression. It's a mark of backsliding. You never come across a believer in the New Testament who absented himself or herself from the public gatherings of the church of Christ of the day.

[7 : 39] And there should never be such a believer on this earth. If a person does that, there's something wrong with him or with her. And they came together as well for fellowship. This is also essential.

Fellowship, Christian fellowship, fellowship together around the Word. You see, the Word is basic to all that they did. They believed the truth. And that's what brought them into the church. And when they were in the church, they met together to study the truth.

And when they were together, they had fellowship on the basis of the truth. Now, fellowship means two things. It means that we are united to Jesus by faith. We have fellowship with him.

And being united to Jesus by faith, we have fellowship with one another in Jesus. We are all one in him by faith. And we have fellowship on the basis of what the Word of God has meant in our lives, has meant to us.

The experience of the Christian is something which emanates, which flows from his knowledge of the truth. It isn't something which is separate in his life from the truth.

[8 : 49] That's not Christian experience. As someone once put it, every experience of the Christian is not necessarily Christian experience.

It is experience which is based upon the truth. And people come together to share. That's the other meaning of fellowship. They come together to share these experiences.

And I must say that I wouldn't want to be a party to the kind of thinking that suggests that Christian people shouldn't meet together in fellowship.

I don't know what these people mean. Because one of the great marks of the Christian church at the very outset of its existence was that they did meet together for fellowship. And again, it is no mark of progression in the life of a Christian if he or she has now reached a stage when they can do without Christian fellowship.

If that's your case, you'll stay tonight. I suggest you'd better have a long, hard look at your spiritual state and recognize that there's something missing vital to your Christian growth, to your spiritual growth.

[9 : 59] There's something missing in your life and you'd better get it back. And you notice this at a time of revival. You notice how Christian people always meet together at times of revival.

It is a mark and a product of revival that they meet. And you know, when your life is all aglow with the spirit of Christ, with love and faith of the Lord Jesus, you can't wait to get into Christian fellowship.

That's the way these people were. They met together for these meetings. And these were special meetings. You see, they met together to study the truth. And then there was a separate meeting, which was a fellowship meeting.

They met together for fellowship. And then they met together for the breaking of bread. Not just having a meal together from home to home, as they did, of necessity in these days.

We'll see that in a minute. But they also met together at the Lord's table. They broke bread. That's the meaning of it. They sat together at the Lord's table. And that's a mark of the Christian church as well.

[11 : 03] Every Christian wants to sit at the Lord's table with other Christians. They're sharing there as well. And you notice that part of the sharing at the Lord's table, by the way, is when you people sit together at the Lord's table, you don't receive the bread and the wine from a minister or from an elder.

You don't need to. You receive the person sitting beside you. You're sharing. And that is an evidence, a mark that together you share the same Lord and that you receive together from him the same blessings and the same benefits.

Then the fourth mark of this church was that they met for prayer. Again, you see, people who love the Lord meet together to pray. So did they.

It was essential, inevitable, that people wanted to meet together for prayer. Not just that they prayed on their own. That is also a mark of the Christian. But a mark of the church.

That is the body of people together is that they're praying together. Together. And again I say to you that it's no mark of progression in your life if you are able to absent yourself from the gatherings of the people of God for prayer.

[12 : 24] And if there are people gathering together to pray and you're invited to go with them, well, you associate themselves with you. You could do worse. I could put it no higher than that. It would be a very good practice on your partner and mine to be together in prayer as often as we possibly could.

Well, no. That church, that body of people was a clearly defined and a closely knit community and unit. They vibrated, as someone put it, with real spiritual life, with abundant and irresistible power. And the members of the early church were conscious of this common bond that united them together.

And this unity found expression in their public and in their former gatherings. And there existed amongst them a spirit of oneness, of love, of joy and of peace and power.

For them, you see, Christianity was a very serious business. We live in a day when things aren't taken all that seriously at all.

[13 : 38] Things aren't taken all that seriously at all. I remember the late Dr. Martin Wright Jones once saying, illustrating this in a very telling way and in a way that I'm sure each one of us can understand.

He said this, that no matter, he says, how serious and how solemn at times and challenging and worrying the news may be presented on the media.

You will discover, he says, that even at the end of the most serious of news bulletins, there must inevitably be struck a note of flippancy, something that's going to make you laugh.

Even at the end of the most serious of news bulletins. And that's very true. And we live in an age when things really, by and large, aren't taken all that seriously at all.

And unfortunately, there are many people in the Christian church who don't take Christianity as seriously as they ought to do. Now for these people in the days of the early church, it was a tremendously serious business for them.

[14 : 50] Their whole life revolved around this. There's too much of the spirit of Pharaoh amongst people today. Well, you're told, well, you can go so far, but don't go too far. Or you can become involved, but don't take your children with you into the wilderness.

You see, there's a lot of that spirit abroad amongst people. Take your life by all means. Become a Christian and by all means become religious. But don't go overboard.

Don't go overboard. When I say to you that these people went overboard, it was everything for them. They took it very seriously. And for them, it involved the dedication of absolutely everything that a man had.

What was his money or his land or his home. And the relinquishing of their private property was not demanded by the church as a formal condition of membership.

But as we read here in chapter 4, as need arose, every man gave towards the need of others. And that leads me to speak to you just for a minute in the passing of you.

[15 : 53] But the early church and what people mistakenly seemed to suggest was the first seeds of communism in the Christian world.

I heard an eminent politician some time ago speak on the television and propounding his own particular brand of socialism, suggesting that it was rooted in the history of the early Christian church, that there you had the beginnings of communism.

Now, that is, if I may say so, absolute rubbish. There isn't this semblance of a suggestion that you had communism or socialism so-called practiced in the days of the early Christian church.

And that is so because these people, I agree that there seemed to have been a sort of a common fund, a common pool, and that people tended to sell homes and land, whatever property they had, and put the proceeds, as Barnabas did, towards this common fund.

He laid the money at the apostles' feet, and the money went into a common fund, and out of that fund, they distributed to the needs of the poor people. Now, the church in Jerusalem was very, very poor indeed financially, because many of them remember or converted Jews.

[17 : 16] And some months ago here, we heard John Graham, who was the Christian witness to us in Australia, telling us what conversion means in the life of a Jew, even today. And it was the same then, and even worse.

A converted Jew is very often ostracized from society. He is disinherited by his family, and he finds himself alone. No friend, no home, nothing.

And you remember that there were thousands of people like that in the church in Jerusalem. And they had nothing, because they were believers in the Lord Jesus. And so the people who did have something, who did have property, tended to sell what they had and build up the church's resources, so that everyone could have something to meet their needs.

Now, someone may say, well, that's communism. I say to you, there's nothing of the sort. The communism that you and I hear so much about is a communism which is dictated by a man or a body of men, a law which is impressed upon people and under which every person of necessity must live.

It is the compulsion of law under that kind of system. Now, there was no such compulsion in the early Christian church. There was no man who stood up and said, you must sell.

[18 : 39] There was no man who stood up and said, capitalism and private enterprise is wrong. There was no body of people who said, you must live in this way. The only law that compelled them to do what they did was the law of love.

The law of love. And if each person felt so inclined and so impelled and compelled by love for his neighbor and for his brother in Christ, to sell what he could to meet their needs, he did it.

But there was no compulsion and that is where the sin of Ananias and Sapphira comes to light. Peter said to them, why did you go and tell a lie?

Why did you say that you had got so much for the house, for your property? And knowing at the same time that you got far more than that for it. Do you not realize, and remember what he said, you were under no compulsion whatsoever to sell your home.

You were under no compulsion to give the whole of what you got to us. Where you went wrong was in deceiving us and making us think that you were giving everything that you got for the home.

[19 : 54] And that in itself proves to you that there was no compulsion of law whatsoever on the early Christian church. There was no communism that the people talk about today.

Communism as we understand it. There was the spirit of love. And I suggest to you that whatever spirit prevails in a communistic system, it certainly isn't the spirit of love, whatever spirit it is.

And that which moved these people to live the way they did was just that, the love of the Lord Jesus. And when you read, for example, chapter 6, and this is why I read chapter 6 here tonight, the reason why the disciples of the apostles, the church leaders of the day, and I'm taking rather long to this, but I'll leave it at this.

The reason why the church leaders of the day decided to set up a diaconate, what we would call today a deacon's court, the reason why they set that up was because there arose in the early church a problem.

You see, I mentioned the poor Jews who were members of the church. Well, there were also, there were other people who were very poor, widows. And there were two categories. There were Jewish widows in the Christian church, and there were Greek widows in the Christian church.

[21 : 10] And the Greeks thought that the Jewish widows were getting more out of the common fund than they were getting. You see, you always get trouble arising within the church itself.

These people thought that they were being, that they were, that they weren't getting a fair deal. So what the apostles did was this. Very well, and we'll sort this out. We'll appoint, we'll get the church to appoint men full of the Holy Ghost, whose function it would be to look after the material concerns of the church, to look after the financial affairs of the church, and to make sure that no one lacks in the church, and to make sure that there's a fair distribution.

So they chose out seven men full of the Holy Ghost, a serious business for the church. But notice, the men in whose hand the business affairs of the church were placed were men who were full of the Holy Ghost.

One of them was Stephen. We'll see about him later on in our studies. Now that's why this body of men called the diaconate, the deacons, were set up in the Christian church.

We come back to this point now. Those people then were compelled to give solely by the law of love. It was a spontaneous response on their part to meet the needs of others.

[22 : 32] And the feature of the early Christian church was powerfully exhibited and prayerfully exhibited in their entire devotion and unbounded brotherly love.

That was a spirit that prevailed in their midst. It's a beautiful picture of the way that people ought to be.

But, and you notice how often that word comes up in the Bible, the beginning of chapter 5, but, there must always be a but. There is always a fly in the ointment.

There's always something within. And this is what, as the, the Prime Minister some weeks ago referred, mentioned, referred to, rightly or wrongly, as the enemy within.

You will always find in the Christian church the enemy within. And in this case, it was Ananias and Sapphira.

[23 : 34] And just for a minute here tonight, look at their sin, the judgment upon the sin, and the outcome of that judgment. Now, the sin I mentioned already was quite simply the sin of deception.

Put it like this. Put it simply like this. Say just now that they sold, take them into 1984. And they sold a house for £40,000. And they came to the treasurer of the church, and they said to the church, will you take what we got for this house, say, towards the funds of the church?

And he says, of course, yes. Well, so they make out a cheque, and they make out a cheque for £20,000. And somehow or other, the Holy Spirit tells the treasurer that these people are telling a lie. They told me that they got, that they got, they told me that, they've told me that they got £20,000 for the house, but I've discovered they got £40,000. Now, that's, it's not that they gave me £20,000, instead of £40,000.

That's not the point. But they said that they were going to give everything they got for the house. And they're only giving half. So what they've done is, they've deceived the treasurer into believing something that isn't true.

[24 : 36] It was the sin of deception. This was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. The sin of deception. They didn't tell the truth.

They hid the truth. Now, maybe you say, well, that's not all that serious, is it? Well, let's look at one or two situations where it might not be all that serious. Remember during the war, you've read stories of this, and you've heard it on television, on radio, and you've heard people talking about it, those of you who aren't old enough to remember what was done and said.

Remember that, during the reign of terror by the Gestapo, for example, in Germany, and in some of the Allied countries, you remember that, when a knock would come to the door in the middle of the night, people would recognize that this was the Gestapo.

A Jewish mother, for example, knowing what was behind that knock and what was involved with the family. What happened? Well, time without number, people hid their loved ones' cupboards and their floorboards and cellars.

They would let the Gestapo in. Have you got anyone in this house? No. And they would adopt a policy of deception.

[25 : 55] Now, what's that wrong? Well, that's a very difficult question because deception in its nature essentially is wrong anyway because it is a lie.

And God is truth. And God tells us that we should never tell a lie. But you see, there are situations in which you might be perfectly justified in deceiving, for example, the Gestapo in order to protect someone that you love from an awful fate.

Even if, by deceiving the Gestapo, you yourself fall foul of their tactics. And you remember the classic story in the Bible, of course, of Rahab and the spies.

Rahab the harlot to whose house the spies from Joshua came. You remember the story. They were seen going into her house and the king's messengers came and she heard them and she knew they were coming so she hid the spies and she deceived her own king's messengers and told them that the spies had gone out a certain way.

She deceived them into going in an opposite direction. And then when they went, she let the spies away. Now, what's that wrong? Well, let's just pray safe for a minute and say this.

[27 : 13] All that the Bible commends in the attitude of Rahab was her faith. She believed God and she was doing it because of her faith. How she came to faith, we don't know because she was an idol worshipper.

She was a heathen. How she came to hear about God and to believe in him, we are not told. But we do know that she was a believer at that time. By that time. And whether she did right or not, or wrong, she did right in believing God anyway.

I know that we're playing safe on that. I'm playing safe on that particular issue. But when you come to Ananias and Sapphira, there were no mitigating circumstances whatsoever. They are there, presented to us in the Bible, as a couple, man and woman, who deliberately lied to the Lord through the apostles.

They made up this plan together. It was completely premeditated. And they decided to stash away so much of the proceeds and hoodwink the leaders of the Christian church into believing that they were giving them everything that they had got for the property.

That was their sin. It was the sin of deception. They posed, in other words, as having devoted their entire property to the cause of Christ, when in reality they were only giving a part.

[28 : 36] And as I said, there was nothing wrong in just giving a part of what they had. The wrongness came in in making people think that they had given everything when they had only given a part.

And notice what Peter says about the source of their sin. He says that it came from Satan. Satan, he says, has entered your heart. Satan has motivated you, moved you. to do this, Ananias.

You see, it was Satan who was behind the act. But it was Ananias who was responsible for the act. For this act of what amounts to embezzlement. It was Ananias himself who was responsible for it, though he was a tool in the hand of Satan.

And it's a sobering thought, my friend, as Jesus told Peter, to think that Satan could be using you and me for purposes which are designed by him to thwart and to injure the cause of Jesus Christ. Without, and you're not able at any time to shift the responsibility away from yourself to Satan. He has moved you. And he's behind it. But you are responsible for it.

[29 : 46] And then he reminds Ananias of the nature of this sin. Thou hast not lied unto man, but unto God. You have lied, in verse 3, to the Holy Ghost.

And this is always the nature of sin. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned. In thy sight, done this ill. This is the awfulness of sin.

And this is why people find themselves unable to deal with sin. And this is where conviction of sin comes in. This is its nature. This is at its heart. And you may be here tonight troubled by sin, annoyed by sin, bowed down by sin, under awful conviction of sin.

And why are you like that? Just because you've made the discovery that not only are you a sinner, but you're a sinner against God and you can't deal with it yourself. You can't deal with it.

You can't handle the situation that has now cropped up in your life. And then he reminds them also, as I said, that this sin on their part was premeditated.

[30 : 51] A concerted plan of action adopted by them both. Deliberately trying to deceive their friends and their leaders. Trying to build a reputation for sanctity and for sacrifice that had no ground whatsoever.

Deliberately trying to menace the love and the fellowship and the unity and the very continuance, continuation of the Christian church. And I think that this sin, this act has something to say to each one of us.

and it is something that is solemn to say to us all here tonight, young and old. And I want to suggest one or two things to you that it says to us. First of all, it is a warning against fanatical enthusiasm. It is possible, and I say this with great reluctance, but I have to say it, it is possible to become religious without having your faculties and your emotions consecrated wholly, fully, totally to the Lord Jesus Christ.

There can't be a devotion without a corresponding honesty and truthfulness and real commitment of life to the Lord.

[32 : 10] And I say that with reluctance, but I have to say it. And I say it with reluctance because I know the danger of becoming religious without becoming at the same time godly in my religion.

The gospel must touch and must purify the heart and the life. I don't want to discourage anyone from becoming religious, and I don't want to drive anyone away from the religion of the Lord Jesus. But all I want to do is to bring you closer into the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Make sure that you're in it with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

Not 20% or 50 or 75 or 90, but 100%. 100%. And that was Ananias and Sapphira's sin, that they weren't in it, that they weren't in this commitment to the cause of Christ with all their heart.

They were in it, but they weren't in it hardly. And that's the first warning it addresses again to us. It also warns against him, it also warns us that God requires sincerity in our life.

[33 : 30] We are not to lie to God. We are not to say, as someone put it, my all is on the altar of service when it is nothing of the sort.

Making things appear what they are not. Do you know what the sin was? It was the sin of hypocrisy. They were hypocrites, saying, you know, what a hypocrite is?

A hypocrite is an actor. A person who's kidding on that things are what they really are not. No such person ought to be in the Christian church.

We'll sing here tonight, later on, what God requires of each one of us is truth in the inward parts. Be what you are. And don't kid on that you're something that you are not.

And I find that difficult to say at the same time. Because the danger to which each one of us here tonight is exposed. And it's something which ought to strike terror into our bones.

[34 : 41] That we could turn out to be something that we really are not at all behind the facade and behind the confession and behind the profession of religion that we make.

it also warns, as I said earlier, against the sin of being in league with Satan. Being used perhaps, it wasn't in their case, it wasn't unknowingly.

They knew what they were doing. But it may be possible for you to be used by Satan without you knowing what you're doing. It is also a warning against trifling with God.

Why, he says in verse 9, did you tempt the Holy Spirit or tempt God that is trying to see how far you can go before you are detected.

It is also a warning against self interest dominating in any man or woman's life, wanting a place for yourself. It is a warning finally against devoting joy from fear and wonder and adoration.

[35 : 48] And you know, you could sum it up like this. really in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, in its application to each one of us, it comes down to this. For you and for me, my friend, it must be either sin or the Holy Spirit that must go from our life.

One or the other, they cannot sit on the same couch in the throne on your heart. They cannot sit in the same chair. They cannot share the same meals.

They cannot share the same pursuits. They cannot share the same practices. It's sin or the Holy Spirit. And you and I must ask ourselves tonight this very searching and this very serious question.

Am I therefore telling lies to God about my life? About the time that I'm supposed and claimed to give to God? About the devotion that ought to be my life to God?

Am I telling lies about my prayer life? Am I telling lies rather about my prayer life? Am I telling lies about my givings to the cause of Christ?

[37 : 03] About the whole of my commitment? About my resolve? And about my love? Ananias and Sapphira posed as having devoted their entire property to the cause of Christ when in reality they only gave a part.

It was falsehood. It was hypocrisy. It was dishonesty. It was deception. And the leaders of the Christian church would have no one playing with religion.

No one playing with Christianity. humanity. No one playing with the Almighty. That was the awfulness of their sin.

They brought God down to the level of the ordinary man. And they thought that they could tell God the lie that they were telling their fellows.

What about you tonight here in this church? What about the reality of your life? What about its genuineness? What about its sincerity?

[38 : 15] How true are you to Christ and to his cause? How true are you to Christ and to his cause?

Surely, my friend, you wouldn't want to be known as a person who has deceived the church and tried to deceive the Lord himself.

God and how was this sin dealt with? I just want to deal with it, this part of the address very, very briefly indeed. What judgment was passed upon these people?

Well, an awful judgment. Read it. Ananias, his sin was exposed and he fell down dead. Three hours later, his wife came into the house.

We don't know the circumstances, we don't know the practices really and the customs of the day. Difficult just for him to imagine this, anything like this happening to ourselves in our day. A husband falling down dead in a house being buried immediately without his wife's knowledge.

[39 : 20] Then his wife coming in and the sin of wife and husband being exposed to her and the news of her husband's death being communicated to her. It's difficult for us to imagine that, but this is what happened.

Why it happened like that, we don't know, but we know it happened like that. And the death of Ananias and Sapphira could probably be attributed to shock. It's been known for people to die of shock.

Those of you who are here tonight in the medical profession, nursing profession, know that. It's been known if someone is confronted straight out with something which comes as a tremendous shock.

It's been known for people to die immediately, instantaneously, in circumstances. But one thing we do know, it wasn't Peter that caused their death.

He didn't bring the curse of God upon them. It was God himself who acted. Whatever means he employed, whether it was shock, we don't know, but it was an act of God that brought their death to pass.

[40 : 26] But someone has suggested this. He says that it isn't really the death of Ananias and Sapphira that comes to us as a shock. It is rather the tremendous and overwhelming impression that you get in this passage of the purity of the Christian church.

The church wouldn't stand having a sin like this perpetrated by any of its members. It just wouldn't stand it.

And there was such an atmosphere and such a spirit of God pervading the church of the day that the church was absolutely at the disposal of the Holy Spirit and no matter how painful the discipline meted out it had to be exercised.

and here you have an example in the Bible and a very early example of the purity of the Christian church demanding discipline of its members.

It was the purity of the church that demanded it together with the holiness of God and the discernment of the Holy Spirit because falsehood was a great barrier to the progress of the Christian church in a world that knew little of the truth.

[41 : 44] And here you have the same emphasis again and again and again. You see the church is different to the world. It has a different standard of admittance and a different standard of practice.

It always has and it must always have that. And therefore a blow must be dealt against falsehood which will vibrate down the years to the end of time and which will make men recognize that the lie cannot be cherished within the bosom of the Christian church in an unbelieving world.

In other words, what the church says is this, the world can say what it's like, but what the church says is this, that the Christian cannot continue to be a Christian, to be impure at the same time.

The Christian cannot continue to be a Christian and a liar at the same time. He mustn't be a Christian and a cheat at the same time. He mustn't be a Christian and a hypocrite at the same time.

The world may want them to be like that, but the church doesn't have them like that. And therefore, the church must exercise discipline. And I would suggest to you that part of the problem with the church today is its very weakness in this very direction.

[43 : 06] And in this area, at the last communions, the minister who was dispensed in the sacrament here, in the Gaelic and the church, mentioned, and the thing has just crossed my mind, mentioned a practice it obtains in the churches in Holland, with reference to admission to the Lord's table.

You remember the point that he made, and I'm sure that a lot of people didn't like it, but it's true, and it's not a bad practice. In Holland, there is such a scrutiny exercised over members of the church that if the leaders of the church discover that any person is falling short in any one area of Christian living, he's not allowed to the Lord's table, he puts it right.

And it embraces every single aspect of a person's life, his relation to his wife, to his family, in his home, in his community, in the congregation, his giving to the church, and so on, if in any area he comes short, he's not allowed, that's discipline, not allowed to come to the Lord's table, that's Christian discipline.

And the church can therefore become very careless by welcoming into its fellowship those who do not promote the welfare of the Christian church.

church. And I would say therefore that it does prospective members of the Christian church no harm to read the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

[44 : 42] And it does us no harm to be reminded of the solemnity and the holiness and the purity of the then Christian church.

Because when we enter the church by faith, we leave unholy practices outside the door of the church. We leave unholy business dealings outside the door of the Christian church.

We leave unholy lips and ears and mouths behind us outside the Christian church. And we must surrender unholy lives and dedicate lives of sincerity and purity to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I find that a very awful and a very solemn statement to make. But at the same time, it would be awful, inexpressibly awful, to die with a lie on our lips.

And therefore it is far better for you and for me to exercise this strict scrutiny and discipline on our own lives so that other people will not have to exercise it on us in the name of a holy and a pure God who demands sincerity.

[46 : 17] humanity. Just in case there may be someone here tonight who's preening his feathers now and saying, well, at long last, a blast at the Christian church.

Let me remind you, my friend, that you are not excluded because the holiness that God demands of me. He demands exactly the same of you.

And if your life tonight is a lie in the presence of God, you remember that God will bring you into judgment for that lie as well.

And if it be that you're here tonight living a lie, telling lies, deceiving people at home, in school, or at work, wherever you may be, you remember that your life lays exposed to the all-seeing eye of the almighty God of whom the psalmist said night as we sang, O Lord, thou hast me searched and known.

Thou knowest my lying down, my rising up, yea, all my thoughts afar to thee are known. I know only too well that there are people in this church just there in every other church in this island and throughout the world who are only too good at finding fault with others without ever stopping to ask, I wonder if God can fault me for the same thing.

[47 : 58] Well, you ask. And if you've got any intelligence at all between your ears, you'll discover that there are an awful lot in your life for which God can fault you.

Finally, the outcome of the discipline that was exercised. The shock that the case of Ananias and Sapphira brought to the church was also a challenge to the church.

And there were two things that arose out of this unsavoury incident and out of this awful judgment, and the death of these two poor people who died with a lie on their lips.

The outcome, the twofold outcome was this fear came upon the church and fear came upon all those outside the church. And there's a difference between the fear that reigns within the church and the fear that reigns outside the church.

And I want to suggest to you what the difference is. you see, the fear of the Christian church was this, that it came face to face again with the awfulness and the greatness and the solemnity and the majesty of God.

[49 : 15] And it began to live in the fear of God. And it began to ask itself the question as the disciples asked that night before Jesus was betrayed at the first Lord's table they ever sat at.

When he told them that one of them should betray him, they asked each one asked, Lord, is it I? That's not a bad fear in the Christian church. The fear of being afraid to bring the cause into disrepute.

It's not a bad fear. And then there was the fear that was present in the world outside the church. The world outside were afraid because they saw what happened. And then there were great signs and wonders performed by the apostles.

People brought sick people so that even the shadow of Peter may rest, may lie on. And that they might be healed. Now, this is an indication of the miraculous power of healing that was bestowed upon the church of the time.

It was the miraculous power of God operating through the church of the day. And people were afraid of that power. And that's not a bad thing either.

[50 : 26] And they were afraid, we read here, that no man, we read here, durst join himself to them, that is to the church. What does that mean?

On the one hand, there were great crowds of people coming to the church believing. Well, that's the work of God. And at the same time, there was a fear amongst other people. They were afraid to join themselves to the church.

What is it? I suggest to you it's a very good thing actually. people were thinking twice before they joined themselves to the Christian church.

That's not a bad thing. They began to ask questions about this wonderful body of people in whose presence and through whom the power of God was showing itself.

And they were afraid of the church. Today, the church is not the object of fear as it used to be, but of derision. because it is too like the world.

[51 : 26] And I know, and you know, that there are many people, there have been many people, for example, outside this island, who have always found fault with the Christian church in Lewis, because their thought was too strict.

They hated it, and they hated it. They were afraid of it, and they are afraid of it. Why? Well, I want to say something to you. Why? Because I believe that these people see the church as something which is not like themselves.

They would like it to be like themselves. Bring it down to their own level, where anything and everything goes. Bring it down to the gutter. But when the church keeps itself, keeps itself apart from the world, not with a spirit of holier than thou, but with a spirit that differentiates it from the world, I suggest to you that the world hates the church, because it is so unlike itself.

why do you think the free church of Scotland has so many enemies within the borders of this island and out with it? Why? Because I don't want the church to be as like the truth as it is.

The church is strict on its membership, on the conditions of admittance to its membership, and rightly so. And the church should never lower its standards just to make it more appealing to an unbelieving world.

[52 : 45] world. The day it does it, it's lost its feet. And that's why the world today laughs at the church. And I'm not surprised that so many people laugh when they hear the likes of Arthur Scargill saying, I'm taking my case to the church.

No wonder people laugh. It's not a bad thing to take your case to the church. If the church has something to say to you, and something to offer to you, and something to give you, and to say with a church of old, thus saith the Lord.

But it doesn't say that. But in those days, the church spoke with authority. It spoke with power. And the power of God was manifested through the church.

At the very time that the church was ridding itself of a dead wood that was wanting to come in and to associate itself with the church. It does the church no harm to exercise discipline in accordance with the truth.

It will do you no harm to bring a truth to bear upon your life, to exercise discipline upon your own life in the light of what the word of God says. It does you no harm to be searched through and through

by the Bible.

[54 : 06] It does you no harm from time to time to sit through a searching sermon. I wish I could preach one to myself and to you because I know that when a person accepts that sermon in the spirit of Christ, I know the reaction of the person to that kind of sermon.

Lord, if I'm not a true Christian now, tonight, make me one right now. You see, if you're a true believer, you wouldn't want to masquerade behind an umbrella of religion in the Christian church, I'll tell you what you'd want to do.

You want to be the best Christian that the church has ever known, to be true to the commitment that you've made and to the profession that you have also made.

And then the early church went forward from that moment, blessed and being a blessing to the world around it. Can you and I go forward like that tonight?

Are you prepared in the interest of Christ to abandon sin? Are you prepared in the interest of Christ to dedicate your life to him, to commit your all to him, to lay it all on the altar of service and to mean it?

[55 : 36] ESTUMP Learned to be Matz in a impossible to to be as a PRO Along to power and any i t Thank you.