**Spiritual Image-Management**

**The Word**

Read together Acts 4:32-5:11

**The Big Idea**

Spiritual image-management is an insidious sin that can infect spiritual communities. We are called to live in the fear of the Lord and to pursue relationships of honesty and authenticity.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. On Sunday it was stated that the greatest challenges to the church have always been from within not from without. Do you agree with that statement?

2. What examples of spiritual image management do you see in the church today? Where specifically are you tempted towards spiritual image management in your own relationships?

3. Read John 5:41-44 about the Pharisees approach to religion, and then read 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 about Paul’s approach. What stands out to you from these passages? What do you connect with? What are you challenged by?

4. Ask yourselves: how are we doing together as a small group on this issue? How can we grow in fostering a group that is increasingly honest, vulnerable, and authentic for everybody?

**Sermon Outline**

I. What is at the heart of Ananias and Sapphira’s sin?

A. Their primary sin wasn’t greed but the misrepresentation of what they were doing.

1. They were not obligated to sell their property nor to give away all the proceeds once it was sold (v. 4)

 2. But they pretended to be more generous than they were

3. They got caught up in the hype, saw Barnabas being praised for his generosity, and wanted to impress others with their generosity.

 B. Spiritual image management

1. They projected an image of themselves that was overly spiritual to try to impress others

2. We are born into this world with a basic desire to impress others and gain their approval, and from an early age we manage our image accordingly

3. The danger is that our projection of ourselves is not aligned with the people we actually are, so there’s a hypocrisy.

 4. Examples of spiritual image management in the church today

- Relational posturing with key leaders, making insightful comments in small group to gain someone’s approval, making false spiritual promises (“I’ll pray for you”), worshiping in such a way to gain other’s approval, overly spiritualized prayers, spiritual justifications for unspiritual decisions, selective vulnerability, covering over challenges

II. Why was God’s punishment so severe?

A. Perhaps because this kind of sin is so subtle and insidious, God wanted to make a not-so-subtle statement on how dangerous it is for a spiritual community..

B. They had just come out of Pharisaical Judaism, so God wanted to set a clear tone from the beginning that this would be a very different kind of community.

C. Spiritual image management is harmful for the person engaged in it

1. Notice how dangerous their spiritual condition is. Satan fhas illed their heart (v. 3), they’ve lied to the Holy Spirit (v. 3), they’ve conspired to test the Spirit of the Lord (v. 9)

2. Spiritual image management reveals that something has gone deeply wrong at the core

3. This was the main issue for the Pharisees (Jn 5:42-44)

 a. In all their religiosity, the love of God wasn’t in their hearts

 b. Their quest for human approval kept them from believing the gospel

D. Spiritual image management is harmful for the community as a whole

1. It creates an ethos of performance and “having it all together” that’s so contrary to the gospel of grace.

 2. It ties up heavy loads on people’s backs (Mt 23:2-4)

 3. The people around you carry a burden: “I have to be as good inside as you appear to be on the outside”

III. How do we live faithfully in light of this?

A. Pursue the fear of the Lord

1. Luke’s main point seems to be the fear of God that spread in the community as a result of this (see v. 5, 11)

2. This is a warning to the church then and now: this is what happens to spiritual hypocrites in the end! So fear the Lord alone!

3. When we fear the Lord rightly, God gets big and people get small

4. Notice Paul’s freedom from human assessment in 1 Corinthians 4:3-4

5. So, as Jesus says in Matthew 6, we need to check our motives in all our spiritual activity to ask: “Am I doing this to be seen by others or to receive the reward from my father alone?”

B. Pursue relationships of honesty, authenticity, transparency, and humility

 1. Confess your sins to one another that you may be healed (James 5:16)

2. Become the kind of person that is a refreshing, honest, and safe presence for others

3. Consider your role in small groups

a. When you feel that nudge towards honesty and vulnerability, take that step and do it (vulnerability breeds vulnerability)

b. When someone shares something that is raw and honest, don’t minimize it, jump to advice, or a quick fix, or spiritualize it. Sit with them in it and offer true grace and acceptance.