

Why Is It Difficult to Tell the Difference Between a Christian and Non-Christian?

This is God's heart for His people:

"O that there were such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" (Deut. 5:29).

"He shall be the stability of your times, a wealth of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is His treasure" (Isa. 33:6).

A heart to truly obey Him is what the Lord has always looked for in His people. This heart is cultivated through our love for the Lord and holy fear. This fear is birthed in God's people primarily through a knowledge of His judgments. Notice in the early days of the church, the effect the judgment that fell on Ananias and Sapphira had on the people.

"In hearing these words, Ananias fell down and died. And great fear came on all those who heard these things" (Acts 5:5).

"At once she fell down at his feet and died. Upon entering, the young men found her dead and carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear came on the entire church and on all those who heard these things. Many signs and wonders were performed among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Porch. No one else dared join them, but the people respected them. Believers were increasingly added to the Lord, crowds of both men and women" (Acts 5:10-14).

We often forget these portions of Scripture and how this component of the fear of the Lord greatly impacted and

contributed to the glory, power and growth of the early church: "NO one else dared join them (the disciples), but the people respected them" (Acts 5:13).

The Message Bible says it this way: "But even though people admired them a lot, outsiders were wary about joining them. On the other hand, those who put their trust in the Master were added right and left, men and women both."

Polarization: One Effect of God's Judgments and the Fear of the Lord

The judgment that fell on Ananias and Sapphira caused sinners to be leery of joining themselves to the apostles and the church while at the same time gaining public respect and influence. This divided or polarized those who were not interested in genuine repentance and living whole-heartedly for the Lord from the multitudes that were being genuinely converted and being added to the church. The dividing line was very distinct. In many places today, it is difficult to tell the difference between the Christian and non-Christian, but not in the early church. God wants to restore this polarization in the church today.

The great fear that came on the entire church and those who heard of these events is a necessary component for the overall health of the church, and it is also a precursor to actual revival and spiritual awakening in the nations. What many Christians don't understand is that these kinds of judgments in the church are a manifestation of God's mercy to the masses, because when the church is judged and cleansed that is when we have the greatest impact on the world. Conversely, when there is lack of judgment in the church, it means a widespread judgment to the masses and mercy reserved for only a small righteous remnant.

Imagine the impact of this judgment, not only upon that present early apostolic generation but upon their children and

grandchildren and the ensuing generations who witnessed these things and/or heard them. When Ananias' and Sapphira's dead bodies were carried out by the young men, it was a dreadful object lesson of the fear of the Lord to future generations. I'm sure this event was voiced abroad for years to come. This was, in fact, a judgment against counterfeit Christianity that greatly impacted the church and the world. As I said, it was an act of mercy to the world in preserving the mighty influence, glory and power of the church from moral compromise and tainted motives enveloped in personal selfish ambition through Ananias and Sapphira. It was important to preserve the purity of the church in the early days of its conception since it was located only in Jerusalem at that time.

Notice the ultimate result that the fear of the Lord had on the early church. The church had rest and peace, was strengthened and encouraged, and also grew numerically.

"Then the churches throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and were built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied" (Acts 9:31, MEV).

Can you see how as the polarization in the early church increased, so did the power and impact increase simultaneously? One of the definitions of polarization is a division into two opposites. Polarization happens when people are divided into contesting groups. Polarization is a concept that comes from science, and it involves light, radiation or magnetism moving in specific directions. Outside of this scientific concept, polarization usually refers to how people think, especially when two views emerge that drive people apart, kind of like two opposing magnets. As an example, when Democrats and Republicans fight, it can cause polarization. A Civil War is also a serious form of polarization. Polarization involves people moving in two directions—becoming almost as separate as the North and South Pole.

In this postmodern day of church growth, which tends to focus more on peripheral and demographic elements, these verses show us the importance of the inward character and holiness of believers and how it relates to both spiritual and numerical growth.

When we fail to include the judgments of God and the fear of the Lord in our doctrine, lifestyle and teaching, we are building with flimsy materials of wood, hay and stubble that will not stand up under the trials, pressures and hardships of life (1 Cor. 3:12-15). The fear of the Lord, which is nurtured through the eternal judgments of God, is a great contributor and foundational to a healthy growing church.