

# TITLE: **AUTHENTIC to be ACCEPTED**

SERIES: **The End of Me** (4 of 4)

Text: Matthew 5:8; Acts 4:32-5:9

Balboa Community Church

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## INTRO

Meet Gerald Barnes. Barnes became a legitimate pharmacist in the Chicago area. But he lost his license after the clinic he worked in was accused of Medicaid fraud. So at the age of 43 he moves to Southern California to begin a new life... as a doctor. The trouble was - he had no medical degree or training. He was a fraud.

He got his first job with a fake resume, but he knew that if he wanted to continue he would have to have more credible credentials. So he searched and found a doctor in Stockton with the exact same name - Gerald Barnes.

He called the California State Medical Board and claimed that his wife had burned all his credentials in a nasty divorce case. The Board was kind enough to send him copies of the real Dr. Barnes' medical license and also his medical degree from the University of Wisconsin.

A few years later he was working at a clinic in Irvine when a 29-year-old Navy patient died because he didn't properly diagnose diabetes. Convicted of manslaughter, he went to prison for 18 months.

Amazingly, when he got out, he returned to his old way of life impersonating a doctor. One of his jobs was doing physical exams for hundreds of FBI agents in the Los Angeles area. That was a big mistake! He was unmasked again and sent to prison.

While being transferred to another federal prison in Minnesota, Barnes escapes, but is found later working yet again at another clinic.

He is presently doing time at a federal prison in Pennsylvania.

Gerald Barnes was a man who wanted everybody to think he was a doctor, when he was not. He fooled many people by his gregarious personality and soothing bedside manner. He was a fake - a charlatan - pretending to be somebody he was not.

Barnes' masquerade may have been extreme, but in a lesser way everyone pretends they are something they are not.

The habit of pretending or being "fake" is so ingrained in us that we probably don't notice doing it most of the time.

But we are so conditioned to want to be impressive and to appear to be perfect that the real "Me" hides behind the fake version of "Me" that I want everybody to see.

There are probably lots of reasons for that:

- 1) We think no one will like us or accept us if they know the real "Me"
- 2) We think that no one could ever forgive us if they knew what we really thought
- 3) We think that everyone expects us to act a certain way. (If you're a Christian...)

There are many more reasons why we fake it - why we pretend that we are something that we are not.

Whatever the reason, though, the truth remains that we are not good at living out Jesus' words in Matthew 5:8...

**Matthew 5:8** - Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. NIV

Now there are a couple of reasons why we are not pure in heart.

- 1) Our hearts are naturally full of sin and evil - we were born sinners.
- 2) We often hide behind a false image of ourselves that isn't who we really are. You might say we are *divided in heart* or have *impure hearts*.

To find out what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are the pure in heart," we need to understand what it means to have a pure heart in a world that focuses on image and pretense.

A great example of this is found in the book of Acts where we see the early church beginning to live out the principles of Jesus. Acts Chapter 4 reveals to us what those early days of the church were like for the first Christians.

[Read Acts 4:32 - 5:9]

As the early church began, there was great camaraderie and unity among the Christians. If anyone had a need, there was another believer who would help them - even if it meant selling their home or property.

One great example of this was Barnabas. He saw a need of another believer and he sold a field and brought the money to the apostles to distribute.

He did this out of obedience to God and love for God and His people. Barnabas did it because he was pure in heart.

Then we find a man named Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, also sold some land and brought the money to the apostles - just like Barnabas.

But they did not do it out of obedience to God or their love for God and His people. They were not pure in heart. We learn that they kept some of the money for themselves, but told everyone that they were giving everything.

They were living a lie. They were not being true, honest and pure in their intentions. Their story teaches us the importance of being authentic with each other so that we can experience the blessings of God.

We can identify a few characteristics of Ananias and Sapphira's hearts that can help us diagnose if we have an impure heart.

## **1. A impure heart is JEALOUS (Acts 4:36-5:2)**

It seems that Ananias and Sapphira saw Barnabas sell his field and give to the church, and they were jealous of the status, appreciation, or attention it gave him.

Scripture doesn't explicitly say what Ananias and Sapphira's motives were, but it sure seems like their hearts were full of jealousy for Barnabas. They wanted to match his gift. They wanted people to like them or accept them because of their generosity.

Their motives were wrong. They didn't do it because they loved God or were actually concerned about their fellow believers. They just wanted to impress the rest of the church with their generosity. Maybe receive some of the accolades that Barnabas received.

Jealousy often is the motivation behind our actions (house, clothes, car). That's why we have to always check our motives. Where is your heart? What is the real reason why you're helping this person? Are you giving to God because you love Him, or out of guilt?

An impure heart gives for the wrong reasons. Check your heart.

## **2. An impure heart is GREEDY (Acts 5:1-2)**

If an impure heart is jealous, it pursues the recognition it desires by being greedy. In Ananias and Sapphira's case, it was financial greed combined with a greed for attention and status. They didn't just want the status...they wanted the money as well. They wanted to be rich AND look good.

The truth is - they could have kept a portion of the sale of the land for themselves. There was nothing wrong with that. They could have easily brought the rest of the money to the apostles and said, "Here's some of the money from the sale of our property." That would have been fine.

But they misrepresented themselves. They weren't being honest. Their sin seems to have been lying about the price so as to gain both notoriety and extra cash.

They were greedy for money AND for status. They wanted to look good AND keep the money.

Greed - that is, wanting more for ourselves - is at the foundation of an impure heart.

## **3. An impure heart is FEARFUL (Acts 5:3-9)**

As the rest of the story plays out, it seems like Peter gives both Ananias and Sapphira opportunities to come clean—to confess—to stop pretending and tell the truth.

If they would have just confessed their jealousy and greed, then perhaps their consequences would not have been so severe. But they kept up their pretense because they were afraid of what other people might think.

And that led to their deaths. It might seem like a harsh consequence, but God is very serious about purity of heart and undivided motives.

I would encourage you to ask yourself: Where does jealousy pop up in my life? What am I greedy about? What am I afraid of? The answers to those questions will most likely reveal areas of your life where God wants to make your heart pure.

I find that most lies that I am tempted to make are because I want people to think better of me... or I want them to think that I'm better than them. We don't usually lie to make people think worse of us. We want people to think we are better.

We are afraid of what other people might think of us.

Our consequences may not be as severe or as swift as Ananias and Sapphira's, but—sooner or later—jealousy, greed, and fear will move from being symptoms in your life to the things that actually run your life.

You have to be willing to take the opportunity to come clean - to strive for purity of heart - then God will bless you.

Satan has fooled us into thinking that hiding behind our lies and putting up a false front is fine, acceptable behavior—and that if you don't do it, you'll be embarrassed, rejected, and unloved. That is a lie from Satan.

But God wants you to know that hiding, lying, and pretending will wear you out. Instead, He is waiting to receive you and purify your heart. God has a real, intimate, joyful relationship waiting for all of us if we're willing to choose what He offers over what feels safe.

Jeff Bethke learned that following Jesus means trusting Him to take care of your reputation, your status, and all of your circumstances. Watch this video clip that paints a vivid picture for us of the battle we face when we listen to "Me" over the voice of God.

*[Video Clip | Sermonette 4]*

When we come to "the end of me," we realize that we don't have to keep up a facade - a fake front - an image so that people will think better of us and actually like us.

Instead, with Jesus living His life through us, we can be authentic Christians who drink the living water that God offers. Our lives can be refreshed, restored, renewed.

Pretending to be something we're not wears us down. Living real life with Jesus gives us real meaning and joy. Real life begins when we come to "the end of me."

As the saying goes: "God loves you just the way you are, but too much to leave you that way."

You don't have to pretend with God. Just be yourself. He loves you. And He wants to take your impure heart and give you a pure heart so that he can radically bless you.