

## **ACTS 5**

The “early church” faced internal and external problems especially early on with dishonesty and greed. Outside the church was being pressured by persecution. But every time God allowed persecution to occur with the early church, it grew because they became more laser focused on sharing the Gospel depending on the Holy Spirit’s leading and guiding.

### *Lying to the Holy Spirit (vs. 1-11)*

**Vs. 1-2** - After Ananias and Sapphira saw the great generosity of Barnabas and how well he was respected in ***Acts 4:36-37***, Ananias and Sapphira decided they wanted to receive the same respect. In the church frequently there is the unholy desire to receive another’s gift – another’s praise – another’s anointing. But you have no idea what a person had to go through to be blessed with what they currently have...you don’t know all the “tests” that person had to endure to have their “testimony.” Be careful wanting what God gives to another. Regarding the phrase *“he kept back part of the proceeds”* - Ananias and Sapphira sold the possession, and gave only a portion to the church, *while implying that they sacrificially gave it all to the church.* Now it was theirs to do what they wanted; they did not have to sell it and they surely did not have to lie about what it sold for. *They wanted to have a reputation like*

*Barnabus but they did not have Barnabus' character and relationship with God.*

At a time when the early church Christians were trying to serve and help their fellow believers, Ananias and Sapphira was selfishly striving to serve themselves. In *vs. 2* the ancient Greek word for *“kept back”* (*nosphizomai*), means *“to misappropriate.”* This is the same word used of Achan's theft in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (*Joshua 7:21*). Regarding the phrase *“his wife also being aware of it”* - clearly, both husband and wife were partners in the deception. They both wanted the image of great generosity, without actually being remarkably generous. **1 Timothy 6:10** says, *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”*

*Vs. 3-4* – Regarding the phrase *“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart”* first of all, their sin was energized by Satan. And since Peter was not in the room when this scheme was developed, God apparently had given Peter supernatural knowledge and discernment of what Ananias had done. This spiritual gift is called the *word of wisdom and knowledge*, and is mentioned in **1 Corinthians 12:8**. And when Peter said *“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart”* their sin was motivated by pride. *Proverbs 6:16-19* is a list of what God hates and first and second on the list is “pride” and lying (a proud look – a lying tongue - *Proverbs 6:17*). Ananias had to have been crushed by Peter's

ascertainment. Certainly, he had to have been expecting praise for his spectacular gift (like what was done for Barnabus), but instead he received rebuke. Peter saw that Satan was at work and because Ananias' sin was publicly lying to the Holy Spirit and lusting after public praise for his generosity, it was appropriate that the sin be exposed publicly. "It is a good general rule regarding confronting someone with sin that secret sins and private sins should be dealt with privately, and only public sins dealt with publicly." Regarding the question Peter asked - "*why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit*" - Peter did not accuse Ananias of lying to the church or to the apostles, but to the Holy Spirit Himself. Peter clearly believed that the Holy Spirit was a Person, because one can only lie to a person. He also believed the Holy Spirit is God – the 3<sup>rd</sup> member of the Holy Trinity. Ananias did not lie to men only but more important he lied to God. Regarding the phrase "*While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?*" Peter freely acknowledged that the land and its value belonged to Ananias alone; he was completely free to do with it what he wanted. His crime was not in withholding the money, but in deceptively implying that he gave it all. *Their sin is imitated in many ways in the present-day church.* We can create or allow the impression that we read the Bible consistently and pray *when we are not*. We can create or allow the impression that we have it all together

*when we don't.* We can exaggerate our spiritual accomplishments or effectiveness to *appear something we are not.* It is too easy to be happy with the image of spirituality without the reality of spiritual life. Now be careful to note that *Ananias and Sapphira were believers,* if they were not, *they could not lie to the Holy Spirit* because if they were not saved; the Holy Spirit would not have been in them to lie to. Satan wants to kill, steal and destroy God's church, so because the church was an infant; God had to be more harsh in dealing with those trying to pollute His infant church. In **vs. 4** regarding the phrase *"while it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?"* This shows how unnecessary their sin was. Ananias was free to use the money for whatever he wanted, except as a way to inflate his spiritual image and pride. And then when it says, *"why have you conceived this thing in your heart?"* Satan had filled the heart of Ananias, yet Peter could ask why he had conceived this thing in your heart. Satan can influence the life of a believer, even a spirit-filled believer, but he can't do your sinning for you. Ananias had to conceive it in his heart. Their great sin was rooted in pride. Pride corrupts the church perhaps more quickly than anything else.

**Vs. 5-6** – The phrase *"Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last"* – we must clearly understand Peter did not pronounce a death sentence on Ananias. He simply confronted him with his sin and

Ananias fell down dead; this was God’s decision not Peter’s. It isn’t the business of the church to pronounce a death sentence on anyone. The death of Ananias was an “act of God” not a pronouncement of punishment from Peter. Matter of fact, Peter was probably more surprised than anyone else when Ananias fell down dead. The penalty seemed harsh, but the infant church needed God to move with great discipline to ensure its purity and survival at this very vulnerable period in time. Actually, the greater wonder is that God delays His righteous judgment in virtually all other cases now. This was a critical juncture for the early church and such impurity, sin, scandal and satanic infiltration could have corrupted the entire infant church at its root. Regarding the phrase “*so great fear came upon all those who heard these things*” – the word for fear here is not an awe or reverence for God; but the *emotion of fear* God gives to all humans (like sadness, disappointment, happiness, etc.) The *emotion of fear* causes us to be cautious – to evaluate and reevaluate conditions or a thing to make the best decision about how to deal with it. As it relates to Covid-19 Delta Variant I will not allow the “*spirit of fear*” to cause me not to worship God, teach/preach, evangelize, complete God’s mission for my life even when the enemy shows up because of **2 Timothy 1:7** – but I will utilize the God given “*emotion of fear*” to cause me to consider and evaluate whether I should be vaccinated or not and/or become a host to

the virus to spread it with loved ones. The “*emotion of fear*” helps me weigh the options of being vaccinated and since I have prayed about a thing; and the Holy Spirit led me to not take the shot. (*Read Philippians 2:4 as a support verse for taking the vaccine*). In the same manner as some church leaders say we are not exercising faith in gathering in person to worship because they say we are allowing fear to come over us; I say why don’t they dismantle their security team; have them turn in their guns at church since they know God will protect them and they don’t have “fear” of what could happen in God’s church. *Hypocrisy is an enemy of the church*. In our text God’s purpose was accomplished in the church as a whole. A true revival (unlike most of the special guest pastor preaching a sermon series at a church today with no period of corporate prayer – no period of confession and repentance of sin beforehand in advance of the revival) is almost always marked by a radical work of God in dealing with the sins of believers. Revival should include a period of inspection for the church that leads to confession of sin and repentance. And then after that; after things are settled, the freshness and newness of blessings can be abounding. God is certainly using this pandemic to bring about a period of contemplation and judgment against the church that should lead to the church to confess and repent of its sins and when we do that; it could lead to a great spiritual awakening in this nation.

**Vs. 7-8** - Sapphira was a knowing and willing participant in this sinful action as well as she participated in the cover-up. God's judgment of her was just as righteous as His judgment of Ananias. We don't know if Ananias suggested this or if Sapphira did or they developed this plan together. But if Ananias thought of it and pressured Sapphira to go along, he was wrong to do so and she was wrong to go along. *The concept of submission in marriage does not extend to submitting unto sin.*

**Vs. 9-11** - Fittingly, the same judgment came upon Sapphira as came upon her husband Ananias. Since they shared the same sin, it was fitting that they shared the same reaction to being found out – shock and horror. Ananias and Sapphira both died, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they did not go to heaven. It is impossible to say for certain, for only God knows. *We go to heaven or hell based on whether we accept or reject Jesus as our Lord and Savior.* When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior all of our sins – past, present, and future are forgiven. We confess our sins and repent of sin while alive to get into proper fellowship with the Lord; to have our specific prayers and the prayers of others hear; and to receive God's choice blessings and to accomplish God's perfect will for our life. Remember all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. A saved Christian can be judged by being "brought home" in death **(1 Corinthians 11:27-32)**. When we are just so

hard-headed, God may bring us home so that the sinful actions we are engaged in can be an example to others to cease from doing them. Now it's easy to condemn Ananias and Sapphira for their dishonesty, but we need to examine our own lives to see if our profession of faith is backed up by our lifestyle practice. Do we really mean everything we pray about in public (or is it what we say because it should be included in a public prayer and we want to sound spiritual)? Do we sing the hymns and Gospel songs sincerely or routinely; is it worship or is it just a task or job? Read *Matthew 15:8*. If God killed religious deceivers today, how many church members/pastors/preachers/singers would be left? Ananias and Sapphira's sin was not robbing God of money but in lying to God, thus robbing God of His glory. Their lust for recognition conceived sin in their hearts and that sin eventually produced death. But the result in this case was a wave of Godly fear (reverential fear) that swept over the church and over those who heard this factual account.

### Continuing Power in the Church (vs. 12-16)

**Vs. 12-13** – A spirit filled church is unified, magnified, anointed and it will multiply. Satan wants to divide the church, disgrace the church, decrease the church; and he will do it if we let him. But here in **vs. 12-16** we see the church triumphed over the attacks of Satan because they yielded to the power and

direction of the Holy Spirit. The text says “signs and wonders” thus the word “*and*” lets us know signs and wonders may be similar but they are not the same thing. *Biblically, what is a sign and what is a wonder?* The word *signs* refer to supernatural occurrences that point to a warning, instruction, or encouragement from God. The word *wonders* point to the response to a sign. The mighty wonders performed by the Apostles at the direction of the Holy Spirit were the fulfillment of Jesus promise in **John 14:13-14** that they would do greater works in answer to believing prayer. When Jesus performed miracles during His ministry on earth He had 3 purposes in mind: (1) to show compassion and meet human need; (2) to present His credentials as the Son of God; and (3) to convey spiritual truth. For example when Jesus feed the 5000 plus, that miracle met their physical need, revealed Him as the Son of God; and it gave Him opportunity to preach a sermon about He being the Bread of Life and He being our Jehovah Jireh. Also, make careful note of the phrase “*through the hands of the Apostles*” God chose to do these miraculous works *through the hands of the apostles* and not mainly through others. **Vs. 13** affirms none of the others joined them; the others were not called nor endowed with the spiritual gifting to do those early church miracles. Be careful buying a prayer cloth and think it will work like God used it in **Acts 19:12**; some miracles God used for that season and that particular person

only; if we are sick; we are to pray and then go to the doctor; take the prescribed medicine or vaccine; we don't need a prayer handkerchief. That was done for that particular time and season and only through the God appointed apostles.

**Vs. 14-16** – These signs and wonders performed by the Apostles was God's way of authenticating the Apostles ministry of being called by God for their ministry. God is not limited in our day and age to do miracle signs and wonders; but we have the completed Word of God and we are to test teachers by their message not by their miracles as stated in **1 John 4:1-6**. It is also significant to note all these people were healed. There were no failures and nobody was sent away because he or she did not have faith to be healed or money to be healed as in our day. The most important thing about the signs and miracles was not the healing of the afflicted but winning of souls, as multitudes were added to the fellowship. The Holy Spirit gave them power for wonders and power for witness according to **Acts 1:8**; because miracles apart from God's word cannot save the lost. The greatest miracle of all is the transformation of an unsaved person into being a child of God by grace through faith in Jesus the Christ. That is the miracle that meets the greatest need, last the longest, and costs the greatest price – the atoning shed blood of God's Son.

*Imprisoned Apostles Freed (vs. 17-21)*

**Vs. 17-18** – The religious leaders were jealous; Peter and the Apostles were already commanding more respect than they had ever received. The difference however, was that the religious leaders demanded respect and reverence for themselves; but the apostles goal was to bring respect and reverence to God. Note the apostles experienced power to do miracles, great boldness in preaching, and God’s presence in their lives; yet, they were not free from hatred and persecution (**Philippians 1:29**). The apostles were put in jail, beaten, and slandered by community leaders. Faith in God does not exempt us from trouble; it will attract trouble. But remember “greater is He that is in you than He that is of this world (**1 John 4:4**) – and no weapon formed against you will prosper (**Isaiah 54:17**). We cannot expect everyone to favorably react to you sharing Christ or some great thing Christ has done for you.

**Vs. 19-20** – Now this was easy for God to arrange. *Angels are all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation* according to **Hebrews 1:14**. God sent forth this angel to minister for the apostles. Locked doors are nothing for God or those who He uses. And it is very possible the apostles understood this was an angel in retrospect because angels often come in human appearance, and it may not always be easy to recognize an angel

according to **Luke 24:3-7**, **Hebrews 13:2**. In **vs. 20** regarding the phrase “*Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life*” – the apostles rescue from prison was wonderful, but it was for a purpose – so they could continue their work. God didn’t set them free primarily for their safety or comfort. They were set free for a reason; and after this they were not always delivered. Sometimes God delivers by a miracle, and sometimes He does not deliver in the way we desire (God is sovereign and only He knows His will for a person). According to the early church historian Josephus, miraculous angels did not always deliver God’s people. Listen to the eventual earthly ending of God’s sent ones: Matthew was beheaded with a sword. Mark died in Alexandria after being dragged through the streets of the city. Luke was hanged on an olive tree in Greece. John died a natural death, but they unsuccessfully tried to boil him in oil. Peter was crucified upside-down in Rome and James was beheaded in Jerusalem. James the Less was thrown from a height then beaten with clubs. Philip was hanged. Bartholomew was whipped and beaten until death. Andrew was crucified and preached at the top of his voice to his persecutors until he died. Thomas was run through with a spear. Jude was killed with the arrows of an executioner. Matthias was stoned and then beheaded – as was Barnabas. Paul was beheaded in Rome. So when a person is sick it is always best to pray, if the Lord wills...Lord, I pray

**You still have work for the sick one to do...Lord if it's your will heal and deliver *so and so* because we don't know God's ultimate will and purpose for our and others life.**

**Vs. 21 - This was remarkable obedience and boldness. If they were not sure if God wanted them to continue their public teaching work, the word from the angel at **Acts 5:20** made it clear that they were to continue. So they went to the most public place they could (the temple), and as soon as they could (early in the morning). When they were thought to be in the prison, they were obediently teaching God's word to the common people. The religious establishment solemnly gathers to deal with the troublemakers who teach about Jesus. They intimidated them with a prison stay, and were about to bring them to the council to put them in the proper place. Yet when the officers looked for them; they saw the prison door as it should be, the guards as they should be, but no apostles in the cell.**

***Apostles on Trial Again (vs. 22-32)***

**Vs. 22-25 – Just like we will see in chapter 12 God used angels to open the door for Peter in chapter 12; God used angels to release the apostles so they could do what **vs. 20** said. Even after seeing the supernatural miraculous power of God throughout this ordeal, the leaders of the Sanhedrin Council**

tried to suppress the truth. This reveals their contempt for God, their desire for vain glory, and their madness. **Romans 1:18** affirms the wrath of God is reserved for those who suppress the truth (truth – Jesus is Lord and Savior – He died on the cross for the sins of man, He was buried, but rose again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day). These hypocrites should have realized from all the circumstances that the prison was opened by God, but they still did not hesitate to rage openly against Him.

**Vs. 26** – The phrase in **vs. 26** that says, “*the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence*” - the apostles were soon **arrested again**. It was perhaps tempting for them to think that since they were miraculously released before that God would keep them from being arrested again, *but that wasn't the case*. When the apostles went back into custody, they knew how easy it would be for God to release them again if it pleased Him to do so. *Their past experience of the power of God had filled them with faith for the present*. And when it says, “*Brought them without violence*” it is significant to note the apostles did not appeal to popular opinion for protection against the religious leaders. They could have incited the crowd by shouting, “Are you going to let them take us away?” But their trust was in God and God alone. A carnal solution to their problem was available, but they did not use it. God had

multiplied the church after their first imprisonment; they believed God could do it again; their resolve was to do God's will no matter what.

**Vs. 27-28** –The phrase in **vs. 27** - *“They set them before the council”* - This was another attempt to intimidate the apostles with the trappings of the council's institutional authority. The Sanhedrin Council had commanded Peter and John to no longer teach in the name of Jesus in **Acts 4:17-18**. Yet Peter and John openly told them that they would continue, in obedience to God (**Acts 4:19-20**). The apostles, knowing how God protected them, were probably not intimidated or even overly impressed. And when the Sanhedrin Council said in **vs. 28** - *“You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine”* - The accusation of the high priest was a wonderful testimony to the effectiveness of the message preached by the apostles. Their message had filled Jerusalem. I wonder what God would do if we filled McKinney/D/FW/America and the world with the Gospel instead of “man's message.” Also, in **vs. 28** when the Sanhedrin Council said *“Intend to bring this Man's blood on us”* - By calling Jesus **this Man**, the religious leaders were obviously avoiding the name Jesus, but they could not avoid the power of Jesus; it stared them right in the face.

Eventually, every knee is going to bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord according to **Philippians 2:10-11**. Additionally, the apostles did not want Jesus to “get em” regarding the Council's statement of bring **“this**

***Man's*** blood on them; the apostles wanted to bring the covering, cleansing blood of Jesus upon the high priest and others in the council to repent and be converted; not be murdered and they die in their sins.

**Vs. 29-32** - We should obey rulers (**Romans 13:1** and **1 Peter 2:13-17**), but not when they contradict God. Jesus said to the apostles in **Acts 1:8** “*you shall be My witnesses*”; but the Sanhedrin Council said you *shall not* be His witnesses.

Thus the apostles clearly let it be known who they obey. We are to obey God over any man rule, law, or provision. The Supreme Court says a man can marry a man and a woman can marry a woman, but that is not what God says in **Genesis 2:24** “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*” While we should try to live at peace with everyone (**Romans 12:18**) conflict with the world and its authorities is sometimes inevitable for the Christian as stated in **John 15:18-**

**19**. In **vs. 29** when it says, “*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus*” - This was a testimony faithful to the foundation of the Christian faith. Peter spoke of:

Man's guilt (Jesus whom you murdered). Jesus' death (hanging on a tree).

Jesus' resurrection (Him God exalted to His right hand). Man's responsibility

to respond (to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins). Peter

referred to the *cross as a tree* because he drew an association from

**Deuteronomy 21:22-23**, where it says that *a person hanged from a tree is*

*cursed by God.* Peter brought attention to the magnitude of their rejection of Jesus, pointing out that they killed Him in the worst way possible, both from a Roman perspective (the cross) and a Jewish perspective (the tree association).

**Vs. 33** – Since the Sanhedrin Council were unable to contend with the apostles on the level of truth, they resorted to naked authority and force. First, threats. Second, a beating. Ultimately, death.” Jesus told the disciples in **Matthew 10:16** *“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”* And **vs. 33** shows why Jesus said this because now the death of the apostles was being set in motion. We had not previously read that they wanted to kill them, but now it is clear. As Christians in America, we better recognize persecution is coming.

**Vs. 34-39** – First of all, adhering to Godly council can lead to good decisions. Gamaliel was a highly respected and brilliant spiritual leader who trained Saul (Paul). The Pharisees formed the largest and most influential religious-political party in New Testament times. They were consistently antagonists of Jesus and the early Christians. The name "Pharisee" means "separated one." Gamaliel in this instance may have helped saved the apostles lives but his real intentions probably was to prevent a division in the council and avoid arousing the Romans. The Apostles were popular among the Jewish people so killing them might start a riot. The Jewish historian Josephus mentioned a

man name Theudas who led a rebellion and thousands of other revolts which all came to nothing but a brief period of turmoil and the Sanhedrin Council stood after each one; hence, they assumed this movement of the apostles would be the same. But oh how wrong were they.

**Vs. 40-42** - The council agreed with Gamaliel hoping what the apostles were teaching and doing would simply fade away. Now we should not be too ready to credit Gamaliel with having uttered something from God; Gamaliel spoke for himself and not for God. There are many movements that may be considered successful in the sight of man, but are against God's truth. Look at present day false teachers who fill multi-thousand seat worship centers every week; collect thousands of dollars every week; yet they are not called by God to be a pastor nor are they a church in which the Holy Spirit dwells.

Numerical and financial success are not the ultimate measure of truth (look at **John 6:60-66**). The Greek word translated "*beaten*" in **vs. 40** can also be translated skinned; the beating they received stripped the skin off of their backs. **Vs. 41** tells us instead of complaining or feeling sorry for themselves, the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. The leaders thought they could intimidate and discourage the apostles with a beating. Instead, they left rejoicing. This marked the first physical abuse that any apostle received for sharing the Gospel. These men

witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, they knew suffering led to glory and redemption so they rejoiced. We too often want everyone to like us; we too often want popularity; but sometimes if not often times; persecution and suffering is a part of the Christian journey for those engaged in kingdom advancement work.

**Vs. 42** – Home Bible studies led to good fellowship and a means to introduce new people to Christ. In the areas of persecution in the world, inviting people to your home for Bible study is still the primary means of sharing the Gospel. This challenges each of us as followers of Jesus. They continued where we may have stopped. We often find the threat of social rejection enough to make us keep quiet about who Jesus is and what He did for us. We need to have the apostles' courage and determination to stand firm for Jesus Christ.