

Acts 5:1 ¶ But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

Acts 5:2 And kept back *part* of the price, his wife also being privy *to it*, and brought a certain part, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

Acts 5:3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land?

Acts 5:4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

The previous chapter ended by telling us how Barnabas sold some property and gave the money to the disciples to help provide the needs of those in the early church. This chapter opens with a couple, Ananias and Sapphira, selling some property to do the same; however, there was one big difference in the two transactions. Barnabas donated the whole of his proceeds from the sale; Ananias and Sapphira conspired to appear just as generous while actually keeping part of the proceeds from the sale for themselves. Barnabas was acting with pure motives; Ananias and Sapphira were acting to bring attention to themselves.

David Guzik made a pertinent observation: "Their sin is imitated in many ways today. We can create or allow the impression that we are people of Bible reading or prayer when we are not. We can create or allow the impression that we have it all together when we do not. 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."

When Ananias brought his gift to the apostles, the Holy Spirit evidently revealed the truth to Peter. He immediately confronted Ananias as to why he had lied. Peter pointed out to Ananias that his lie was a work of Satan in his heart directed toward the Holy Spirit, to God.

Peter goes on to clarify that though the temptation to deceive evidently came from Satan, it was clearly his choice to yield to that temptation and conceive to deceive. Yes, Ananias had lied to men, but they would probably never have known without the revelation of the Holy Spirit; in truth, their lie was against God.

It is significant to note that Peter referenced both the Holy Spirit and God as "the One" sinned against.

Acts 5:5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

Acts 5:6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried *him* out, and buried *him*.

Acts 5:7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

Acts 5:8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

Acts 5:9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to

tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband *are* at the door, and shall carry thee out.

Acts 5:10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying *her* forth, buried *her* by her husband.

Acts 5:11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

These next verses actually come as quite a shock. God dealt swiftly and severely with Ananias for his deception—He fell down dead. This provoked great fear among the body of believers when they heard about it. Evidently some young men were assigned to prepare the body for burial and bury it immediately—without even consulting his wife. It makes sense to me that when the Holy Spirit revealed to Peter what was going to happen, He revealed the whole conspiracy between husband and wife.

About three hours later Sapphira came in and Peter asked her specifically whether they had sold the land for \$X, and she immediately confirmed the amount donated by Ananias. Peter immediately rebuked her for planning such deception with her husband—a deception that in effect was a test of God’s righteous judgment. Peter then told her that the same young men that had buried her husband would now bury her, and she too fell down dead. She was buried beside her husband, and I’m sure the news spread like wildfire among the body of believers. Everyone that heard responded with great fear.

My first thoughts were along the lines of—This wasn’t even one of the worst types of sins like murder. Why no opportunity to repent? Why death? How is this justified considering how Jesus responded during His ministry to known/accused sinners?

I think it was extremely important for these believers in the early church to realize that God is omniscient and is aware of all the works happening in the church. Every letter to the seven churches in Revelation begins with just such a statement. It was also important for them to learn that we can have no secret sins. As scripture boldly declares, God not only knows our actions, he also knows what is in our hearts and what we are going to say even before we speak.

1 Chronicles 28:9 “And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts....”

Psalms 139:4 “For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.”

These early believers were going to face great persecution for their faith. I think that along with the signs and wonders that testified to the power of God, this demonstration of God’s presence with each individual was important to growing their faith and preparing them to face that persecution so as to honor and glorify God. Just as God wanted to protect the fledgling nation of Israel from sinful

influences from the idolatrous nations in Canaan, He wanted to protect the early church. This was necessary for the church to be able to grow as strong as possible spiritually before facing the persecution to come. Just as with Israel, their spiritual strength would depend on a healthy fear and respect of God as the LORD.

Acts 5:12 ¶ And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

Acts 5:13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

Acts 5:14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

Acts 5:15 Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

Acts 5:16 There came also a multitude *out* of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

I think the link between this section and the previous one is the significance of these actions of God had in promoting spiritual health during the early growth period of the church. The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. The wording seems to imply that they used the Solomon's porch area at the temple as their base for teaching. I think "of the rest" is a reference to other Jewish rabbis that also taught in the temple precincts. These other rabbis were careful not to associate themselves with the apostles.

Many men and women were "added to the Lord" during this period. I thought this expression was unique. Paul likened the church to a body in his letter to the Corinthians and identifies that body as the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:12–13 & 27 "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit....Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

That the religious leaders were obviously against the apostles didn't matter to the multitudes that held them in high esteem. They brought the sick to the streets on beds and couches hoping to be overshadowed by Peter as he passed by; I think this implies that such actions resulted in miracles of healing. I am reminded that it was her faith that the Lord attributed to the healing of the woman who believed that if she could but touch His robe she would be healed.

Luke 8:46–48 "And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately. And he said unto her, Daughter,

be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace."

I believe the same principle of healing faith was at work in this situation. I don't believe Luke would have mentioned such actions unless they had contributed to the spread of the ministry of the apostles. News quickly traveled to the cities surrounding Jerusalem, and multitudes from these areas brought in people who were sick and vexed or harassed with demonic spirits. Just as with Jesus—all who came seeking healing were healed.

It is significant to me that all healings performed by Jesus and the apostles were done freely and without regard to person. No one was charged a fee and everyone who came was healed. How different from how those who claim to be faith healers today operate! No one was turned away because they didn't have a ticket or didn't pass the required prescreening.

Acts 5:17 ¶ Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, Acts 5:18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

Acts 5:19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

Acts 5:20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

Acts 5:21 And when they heard *that*, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

Acts 5:22 But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,

Acts 5:23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.

It didn't take long for the high priest and the Sadducees to get riled up because the disciples had ignored their demands; they were jealous that the apostles were becoming so popular and honored among the masses. They finally had the apostles arrested and put in prison. That night an angel of the Lord came and opened the prison doors and set the apostles free instructing them to go and share the gospel in the temple precincts. Was this a reference to Jesus? In the Old Testament the term "the angel of the Lord" referenced a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. It seems strange to me, however, that this identification would be used in connection with Jesus appearing to His chosen disciples.

The apostles did as they were told showing up at the temple early in the morning. When the high priest and his gang called a gathering of the council (the Sanhedrin) and the senate (evidently including a larger group of elders among the religious leaders), they sent for the prisoners to be brought to them. The officers in charge of the prison had to come and report that though they had carefully secured the doors and stationed guards at those doors, the prisoners

were not to be found. Note that the doors were still closed and the soldiers in place when the officers went to get the prisoners.

I liked this statement by Guzik: “The apostles, like Jesus whom they represented, were persecuted because their good works and popularity were a threat to those who had an interest in the status quo of the religious establishment. Sadly, the religious establishment of that day left the people worse off, not better.” I would add that the same could be said of many recognized as leaders in the church today.

Acts 5:24 Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

Acts 5:25 Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

Acts 5:26 ¶ Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

Acts 5:27 And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council: and the high priest asked them,

Acts 5:28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.

When the high priest, the captain of the temple guard, and the chief priests heard the testimony of the prison officers, they were perplexed about what to do next. Someone finally showed up to tell them that the prisoners were in the temple teaching as usual. The captain of the temple guard went directly to detain the apostles and bring them to the council, though they were careful to treat them respectfully for fear of a violent reaction from the people gathered around them. Isn’t it interesting that they feared the people more than they feared the response of the One working in such obvious power through the disciples!

The high priest immediately confronted the apostles regarding their disobedience to the directive of the council forbidding them to teach in the name of Jesus. In fact, he pointed out that they had “filled Jerusalem” with their teaching that included holding the religious leaders responsible for the death of Jesus. They didn’t like being accused of murder. They had justified their decision as being for the good of the people, and didn’t like being confronted with the truth.

John 11:47–50 “Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.”

Acts 5:29 Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

Acts 5:30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on

a tree.

Acts 5:31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand *to be* a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Acts 5:32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and *so is* also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

Acts 5:33 When they heard *that*, they were cut *to the heart*, and took counsel to slay them.

Peter and the other apostles boldly declared that they would obey God rather than men (specifically “you” implied). It was “the God of our fathers,” the God these religious leaders were supposed to be serving, that resurrected Jesus whom they had crucified. In fact, God had exalted this same Jesus as the Prince and Savior of Israel. In other words, Jesus had come in fulfillment of God’s promises to both Abraham and David. As the Messiah, He had come to bring Israel to repentance before God and to provide forgiveness for their sins. They identified not only themselves, but also the Holy Spirit as witnesses to the truth of their message. They declared that the Holy Spirit (of God) was a gift to those that obey God and accept His Messiah.

Paul tells us that the Spirit’s work in one’s life is evidenced by the fruit produced in that life. The presence of the Spirit in one’s life is God’s guarantee of our eternal inheritance.

Romans 8:9–10 “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.”

2 Corinthians 1:21–22 “Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

Ephesians 1:13–14 “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

Galatians 5:22–24 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”

You would think the phrase “cut to the heart” to be a reaction of acknowledging guilt. Context, however, reveals that they were furious and determined to kill the apostles.

Acts 5:34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

Acts 5:35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what

ye intend to do as touching these men.

Acts 5:36 For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

Acts 5:37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, *even* as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

Acts 5:38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

Acts 5:39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

At this point in the narrative we are introduced to a wiser man among the Pharisees identified as Gamaliel, a doctor of the law who was of good repute among the people. Easton's Dictionary adds that he was the grandson of the famous rabbi Hillel and was president of the Sanhedrin during the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius. Eerdman's adds the following: "He was the first of only seven in all of rabbinic history, however, to be distinguished *Rabban* ("our teacher/master"). He may thus be understood as the greatest living authority and most revered figure in all of Judaism ca. A.D. 20–50."

Scripture also reveals that Paul the Apostle was a student of Gamaliel.

Acts 22:3 "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day."

After hearing the intent of the council, Gamaliel stood up to warn them against making a rash decision. He reminded them of a couple of other men who had claimed to be "somebody," implying in defiance or against the established religious leaders of the day. The first was Theudas; he gained a following of about 400 people. When he was killed, his followers basically disbanded. Another was identified as Judas of Galilee who evidently emerged as a leader around the time of Jesus birth, the Roman census. His followers also disbanded after his death. In like manner, he believed that the followers of Jesus would also end up disbanding if this was a work of men. If, however, these men were actually teaching and serving according to the will of God, they would not be able to destroy their work and would even be positioning themselves against God.

Acts 5:40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

Acts 5:41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

Amazingly, Gamaliel's advice carried the day, but they didn't let the apostles go without punishment. They called the apostles back and flogged them. Again,

they forbade them to teach in the name of Jesus and once again let them go free. You would think they would leave moaning and groaning in pain; however, that that was not the case. The apostles left the council rejoicing that they had been accounted worthy to suffer shame in honor of the name of Jesus. They evidently believed what Paul would later share in his epistle to the Romans.

Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Jesus had warned them that they would suffer as His servants just as He had suffered, but with that warning came a promise of blessing for persevering in their faith.

Matthew 5:11–12 "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

John 15:18–20 "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Acts 5:42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

We note that the apostles continued to teach and preach Jesus Christ, Jesus the Messiah, the Savior, in the temple precincts and in home fellowships. They were not at all concerned about obedience to the laws of men when that required them to disobey God. May we in the body of Christ in America today be just as bold and brave as the apostles were in the face of growing antagonism toward and persecution of Christians in our own country and throughout the world! Like the ruling council in Jerusalem, government leaders will seek to enforce the laws of men in direct rejection of the laws of God as declared in His word. There have already been reports in the media regarding judgments against Christians who have chosen to take a stand and operate their businesses according to Christian principles that are declared to be unfair and discriminatory.