

Acts 5: Holy Spirit operates in Truth & Persecution spreads the Gospel

THEME: Death of Ananias and Sapphira; second persecution.

As we come to chapter 5, we are continuing to see the effects of the great sermon that Simon Peter gave. Also we are introduced to the first defection in the church, followed by the death of Ananias and Sapphira—who were Christians, but were not living on the high spiritual level of the early church.

At the end of chapter 4 we were introduced to a man by the name of Barnabas. He will be before us again. He was one of the wonderful saints in the early church, a true man of God. He was the first missionary partner of the apostle Paul when they went into the difficult Galatian area, and yet God marvelously blessed their ministry there.

Barnabas had given quite a sum of money to the church. He had made a generous contribution, and everyone was talking about it. I imagine he received a great deal of publicity for his generosity. Remember that in the early church they had all things common. It reveals the fact that they were on a high spiritual level to be able to do this.

Now the first defection comes in. Having all things in common could not continue and did not continue simply because of the carnal nature that is in mankind. - McGee

Ananias and Sapphira

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

It is obvious that they were imitating Barnabas. They saw that he got a certain amount of publicity, and they thought it would be nice if they could get that kind of publicity too. They wanted it.

I have found that there are people who will give in order to be noticed. I recall a meeting with businessmen in Pasadena when I was a pastor there. We were planning to start a youth organization, and we were asking these men to give donations for the founding of this movement. It was decided that donations would not be made public.

I was informed that one of these men would contribute very little if he were not given the opportunity to speak out publicly to let everybody know how much he was giving. It is quite interesting that he contributed a small amount. After the meeting he confided in one of the men that he had intended to give about ten times that amount, but he had expected to be able to stand up or at least raise his hand to indicate how much he had given. You see, pride is still in human nature today. That was the condition of Ananias and Sapphira. - McGee

Act 5:2 And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.

There was nothing wrong with the fact that they kept back part of the money. They had a right to do that. The property had been theirs and they had the right to do with the money whatever they wished.

Today, we in the church are under grace. We are not forced to give any certain amount. Someone may say we ought to give a tithe. In the early church they gave everything they owned. Ananias and Sapphira did not give it all but kept back part of it, which they had a right to do. Their problem, their sin, was that they lied about it. They said they were giving all when actually they were keeping part of it for themselves.

I don't like to have people sing the song that talks about putting "my all" on the altar. Unfortunately, that makes liars out of the people who are singing. We need to be very careful about the songs we sing. A vow to the Lord should never be made lightly.

Ananias and Sapphira said they were laying all on the altar, but they were lying about it. - McGee

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Act 5:3 *But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?"*

The sin of this man and his wife was that they lied about it. - McGee

Act 5:4 *While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."*

There are people today who deny that the Holy Spirit is God. You will notice that Simon Peter believed He was God. First, he says, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" Then he says, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." The Holy Spirit is God. - McGee

Act 5:5 *Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.*

There are those today who think that Simon Peter caused the death of this man, Ananias. They even blame him for his death. I want to absolve him of this crime. Simon Peter was probably as surprised as anyone when Ananias fell down dead. I don't think that he knew at all what was going to happen. Do you know who struck Ananias dead? God did. Do you feel that you want to bring charges against God? Do you want to call the FBI to tell them that God is guilty of murder? May I say to you, if you can give life, you have the right to take it away. This is God's universe. We are God's creatures. We breathe His air. We use bodies that He has given to us. My friend, He can take our bodies any time He wishes to. God is not guilty of a crime. This is His discipline within the church. God is the One who is responsible for the death of Ananias and Sapphira. – McGee

Are you aware of the proximity principle in the Bible? The closer you are to God, the closer you are to His righteous, and higher the standard.

Read **2 Sam 6:6-7** *And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and [d]took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his [e]error; and he died there by the ark of God.*

How close are you willing to get to God? It is our free will that keeps us at distance – not God!

Act 5:6-9 *And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much." Then, Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out."*

Simon Peter knows what will happen to her. He did not know what was going to happen to Ananias, but now it is obvious what will happen to this woman. - McGee

Act 5:10-11 *Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.*

There are two things that amazed me about this incident. One is the fact that a lie, such as these two were living, could not exist in the early church. There was a holiness of life in the church. Ananias and Sapphira, although they were saved, lied to the Holy Spirit and were removed from the company of believers. They had committed the sin unto death. "If any man sees his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto

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death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it" (1Jn_5:16). This was a sin unto death which Ananias and Sapphira committed. This kind of sin could not exist in the early church.

There was defection in the church and it required discipline. However, after this experience the church would never be as pure as it was before. Up until this time they had all things in common. This incident almost ruined them. We shall see more of this in the next chapter.

Fear came upon all the church, and fear came upon people who heard of these things. Power would continue in the church, and multitudes would be saved. Yet the church would never be as pure as in those first days of existence.

The other amazing thing is the spiritual discernment of Simon Peter. This is also lacking today.

I was very much amused at a young man who came to me in a Bible class not long ago. He told me he had the gift of discerning spirits, and he could tell truth from error. Then he quoted one of the worst heretics today. I questioned him again about his gifts of discernment of spirits, of truth and error, and then asked him whether he approved of the man whom he had just quoted. "Oh yes," he said, "this man speaks the truth." I told him that I didn't believe he had any special gift—he just thought he did.

Today the worst kind of hypocrite can get into our Bible churches. They are not good at coming to Bible studies—I have discovered that, but they can hold offices and even run the church. If those who lied to God in our churches were to drop down dead, we would have a lot of funerals. The undertakers would be doing a land-office business. - McGee

Many Signs and Wonders Done

Act 5:12-14 And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. Yet, none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

Notice that the apostles exercise the apostolic gifts. Gifts of healing and gifts of miracles were sign gifts which were given to the apostles. They did many signs among the people.

The discipline in the church had put a fear on the people and had stopped the revival. Yet there were those who were still being saved. Believers were being added to the Lord. We know that by A.D. 300 there were millions of people in the Roman Empire who had turned to Christ. - McGee

Act 5:15-16 so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

May I compare this to modern faith healing? Modern faith healers never heal all the people who come to them. Have you ever noticed that? The apostles had sign gifts, friend. No one in the church since then has had those gifts. People were healed, every one of them. They emptied the hospitals. This was the power of the early church.

We must remember that at that time there was no written New Testament. The church is built on Jesus Christ—He is the Cornerstone—and the apostles were witnesses to Christ. The sign gifts were given to them to demonstrate the fact that they spoke with God's authority. Today we have a written New Testament as our authority. - McGee

The Apostles Arrested and Freed

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

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Notice that the Sadducees are leading in the persecution. It was the Pharisees who had led in the persecution against Jesus; it is the Sadducees who lead the persecution against the early church. So, the apostles are arrested for the second time and are put into prison. - McGee

Act 5:19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said,

This translation should be “an angel” and not “the angel.” In the Old Testament, the angel of the Lord was none other than the preincarnate Christ, but now Christ is the Man in glory at God's right hand, and He is the One who is directing the activity of His apostles. Today, unfortunately, much of the time His hands and His feet are paralyzed because the people in the church are not moving for Him in this world. Jesus Christ wants to move through His church. He wants to move through you and me if we permit Him. This is not Christ who appeared here; it was an angel. - McGee

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

The angel aptly referred to the Christian faith as this life. It is not just a creed or set of doctrines, but a Life—the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus imparted to all who trust Him. - Believers Bible Commentary

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

At daybreak the apostles were teaching at the temple. In the meantime, the high priest met in solemn conclave with the council (the Sanhedrin) and the senate (all the elders) and waited for the prisoners to be brought before them. - Believers Bible Commentary

Act 5:22 But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported,

Act 5:23 saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!"

This is the same sort of thing that happened at the resurrection of Christ. The stone wasn't rolled away to let Jesus out; He was out before the stone was rolled away. The stone was moved to let those on the outside come in. The same thing happened here. The doors did not need to be opened to let the apostles get out. They were out long before the doors were unlocked. - McGee

Act 5:24-25 Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. So, one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"

The bewildered officers had to report to the court that everything at the prison was in good order—except that the prisoners were gone! The doors were properly locked, and the guards were all at their stations, but the occupants were missing. A distressing report indeed! “Where will it all end?” mused the captain of the temple and the chief priests. “How far will this popular movement go?” Then their questions were interrupted by a messenger announcing that the escaped prisoners were back at their old stand in the temple—teaching the people! We must admire their courage, and we must regain the capacity of the early church to suffer for our convictions at any cost. - Believers Bible Commentary

Act 5:26-28 Then, the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"

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The officers used no violence in bringing the apostles to the council. They feared the people would stone them if they were openly rough to these followers of Jesus, now held in high regard by many of the common people.

The high priest served as spokesman. "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?" He purposely avoided using the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. "You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." This was an unintentional compliment to the effectiveness of the apostles' ministry. "You intend to bring this Man's blood on us." But the Jewish leaders had already done this when they cried, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Mat_27:25). - Believers Bible Commentary

Act 5:29 But, Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men.

The apostles were obeying what their Lord and Master had told them to do. Believers are commanded to obey civil authority—except when it comes in conflict with the commandment of God. - McGee

Do you do this? Too many times we tend to obey men when the price is high.

Act 5:30-32 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Previously the apostles had prayed for boldness to speak the word. Now with courage from above, they insist that their obligation is to obey God rather than men. They flatly declare that Jesus had been raised up by God, that Israel had murdered Him by hanging Him on a tree, but that God had exalted Him to His right hand—a Prince and Savior. As such He was willing to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. As a final thrust, the apostles add that they are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God gives to those who obey Him by believing on His Son.

God raising up Jesus (v. 30) may refer to His Incarnation or His resurrection. The probable meaning here is that God raised Him up, in Incarnation, to be the Savior. - Believers Bible Commentary

Act 5:33 When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.

Act 5:34-37 Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After, this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed.

Deep conviction accompanied the words of these embodied consciences—so deep that the rulers of the Jews plotted to kill them. At this juncture Gamaliel intervened. He was one of the most distinguished of Israel's rabbis, and the teacher of Saul of Tarsus. His advice does not indicate that he was a Christian or that he was even pro-Christian. It was simply worldly wisdom.

After having the apostles taken from the room, he first reminded the Sanhedrin that if this movement were not of God, it would soon collapse. Two illustrations of this principle were offered: (1) Theudas, a self-styled leader with about four hundred revolutionaries, who was slain and whose men were scattered; (2) Judas of Galilee, another fanatic, who stirred up an abortive sedition among the Jews, but who also perished, and whose followers were dispersed. - Believers Bible Commentary

Act 5:38 And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but, if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God."

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If this Christian religion were not of God, the best thing would be to leave it alone, and it would soon fade out. To combat it would only make it more determined to survive. (This argument is not altogether true. Many godless institutions have flourished for centuries. In fact, they have gained more adherents than the truth. But the argument is true in God's time, if not in man's.)

On the other hand, Gamaliel continued, if the movement were of God, they would not be able to overthrow it, and they would be found in the awkward position of fighting against God. - Believers Bible Commentary

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

If these men were innocent, they should have let them go. If these men were guilty, they should have held them and punished them. Beating them and then letting them go was a sorry subterfuge. They should have listened to Gamaliel a little more carefully.

Things aren't much different today. There is that gray line between guilty and not guilty. The courts today let people off by giving them some light sentences. My friend, if a person is guilty, he should be punished. If he is not guilty, he should be let go with no sentence. - McGee

Act 5:41-42 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

The beating inflicted on the apostles had two unexpected results. First, it caused them deep joy that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name they loved. Second, it sent them forth with renewed zeal and persistence, daily in the temple and in homes, teaching and preaching Jesus as the Messiah.

So once again Satan outwitted himself. - Believers Bible Commentary