

THE BOOK OF ACTS

CHAPTER 5

THE CHALLENGE OF CHAPTER FIVE

The following story of Ananias and Sapphira should cause us to examine our own heart motives in giving to the Lord. It should also cause us to realize the seriousness of lying to the Holy Spirit and the results.

We are told in 2 Timothy that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12), something that we see clearly in chapter 5. Religion hates the gospel and will do everything to stop its influence in the world. But Jesus told us, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Living a godly life according to the Word of God will cause persecution in our lives. Similar to the first apostles, we will suffer tribulation in this life, but we can be of good cheer knowing the gospel cannot be stopped because Jesus has already won!

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA (1-11)

This chapter highlights the sin unto death as Ananias and Sapphira demonstrate the result of committing that sin. Individual accountability before God is also highlighted.

THE SIN UNTO DEATH

Until this time, the attacks against the church had been external, through the Sanhedrin, the scribes, and the Pharisees. But beginning in chapter 5, the main attacks of Satan turn toward internal dissension.

This sin unto death, unlike the unpardonable sin, is not one particular sin committed exclusively by believers. This sin is the final in a series of sins.

1. The principal is taught in the Old and New Testaments:
 - a) Psalm 118:17-18
 - b) Ezekiel 18:23-24
 - c) 1 John 5:16-17

2. There are seven biblical case histories of the sin unto death:
 - a) Achan (Joshua 7)

- b) Saul's consultation with the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:15-19)
- c) Hezekiah's disobedience (Isaiah 38)
- d) Ananias and Sapphira's lies to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11)
- e) The Corinthian man's incestuous relationship (1 Corinthians 5:1-5)
- f) A believer's carnality at the Lord's table (1 Corinthians 11:30-31)
- g) Hymenaeus and Alexander's Apostasy (1 Timothy 1:19-20)

ANANIAS LIES TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA CONSPIRE

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

Ananias and Sapphira are wealthy land owners in Jerusalem. They probably decide to duplicate Barnabas' gift, but give out of a wrong heart motive.

They are not living to please the Lord but to receive the praise and applause of men. They are carnal. They have been outdone by a spiritual man, Barnabas, and they want to have the attention turned away from Barnabas and toward them.

Many things may inspire us to give. We may be inspired by the example of another who has given, but our giving must always be motivated out of a love for God.

Act 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.

This sin is parallel to that of Achan in Joshua 7. Ananias and Sapphira do not have to bring the full amount of their possession. There is no pressure by Peter or any other church leader. We give as we purpose in our own heart, not grudgingly or of necessity (2 Corinthians 9:7). The purpose of this story is not to cause people to feel guilty for not giving. The purpose is to prevent people from lying about their giving. Do not give a portion and say you gave all.

Ananias comes to the meeting alone, and Sapphira comes later. They wanted to split the glory and make it last longer. She will arrive approximately three hours later (verse 7).

PETER CONFRONTS ANANIAS

Act 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?

Peter receives a word of knowledge by the Holy Spirit. Satan cannot possess a believer, but can persuade minds when we are carnal. Although Ananias and Sapphira are believers, they are under the control of Satan.

Act 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.

Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power (authority)? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

While he owned it and sold it, he was free to do with it as he pleased. The Word is strong on individual ownership of property -- free enterprise.

ANANIAS GIVES UP THE GHOST

Act 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.

And Ananias hearing (having heard) these words fell down, and gave up the ghost (his spirit): and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

Even after hearing these words, Ananias has an opportunity to repent. "Having heard" indicates he understands the situation and does not want to admit his sin or repent. This sin is premeditated. Ultimately, he lies to God and dies under the judgment of God, the sin unto death. This judgment brings great reverence to the people of the church.

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

Ananias is bound up in grave clothes and buried quickly. (Burials were performed immediately in the ancient world.)

The "young men" of the congregation are those studying for the ministry. They could have been students or new converts, but they are doing the tasks of the ministry. In the Word of God, the younger men are usually responsible for the work of the ministry in preparation for preaching in the pulpit.

SAPPHIRA LIES TO THE HOLY GHOST

PETER QUESTIONS SAPPHIRA

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

Not one man or woman has gone to Sapphira and told her what had happened to her husband. They all stay in the service and worship the Lord. All present have a renewed reverence for the Lord.

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

Peter gives Sapphira an opportunity to tell the truth before the congregation, but she also lies. She is not held accountable for her husband's sin unless she is in agreement with it. Her answer reveals her heart.

PETER CONFRONTS SAPPHIRA

Act 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.

Now a word of wisdom comes to Peter and he explains what is about to happen to her. The same men who had buried her husband will bury her.

SAPPHIRA GIVES UP THE GHOST

Act 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.

The same sin brought the same judgment.

Ananias and Sapphira are not judged because they did not bring all the money they received. They are judged because they lied.

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

The honeymoon period of Acts 2 is over, and a new commitment has settled into the hearts of the people.

This story teaches on the importance of commitment to the Word of God and the local church.

Acts 2:42 showed these believers began with a commitment, "they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine."

SIGNS AND WONDERS BY THE APOSTLE'S HANDS (12-16)

The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira bring great reverence for God. Many other signs and wonders are performed through the hands of the apostles, and although some sinners do not join themselves to the apostles, the church has a good report among them.

As a result of the signs and wonders, new believers are added as the unsaved are drawn to the healings performed.

Act 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.)

Great reverence for God allows the Holy Spirit to do more signs and wonders through the church leadership.

Act 5:13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified **(esteemed)** them.

Sinners do not join themselves to the apostles, but speak very highly of the believers and church leaders. The church has a good rapport with people who do not agree with their beliefs and doctrines.

5:13 esteemed, *megaluno* (meg-al-oo-no); To make great, to enlarge, to magnify, to increase, to make conspicuous, to extol, to show respect, to hold in high esteem. When Ananias and Sapphira were judged, many shrank from associating with the apostles and their services. Despite all this, the public looked at the new Christian worshipers favorably (*megaluno*).

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

Act 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.

More unity brings more signs and wonders. More signs and wonders bring more souls into the kingdom of God. There are so many people receiving the Lord, numbers are no longer mentioned. In chapter 2, three thousand were added. In chapter 4, five thousand were added. Now “multitudes” are added.

The healing ministry brings great popularity to the disciples with the unsaved multitudes who need healing.

Healing comes in many different ways in the Bible. The woman with the issue of blood was healed through the anointing in Jesus' clothes. Paul later sees people healed through handkerchiefs and aprons. The anointing for healing radiates from the minister. Here, Peter's

shadow does not heal, but the power of God which radiates through Peter brings the healing. The faith of the people is not in Peter but in God's power.

Act 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.

Whether through hands, shadows, clothes, or any other means, God's purpose is to heal all just as it is to save all (2 Peter 3:9). These are the same results that accompanied the healing ministry of Jesus. Jesus also yielded all (Matthew 4:23-24; 8:16; Acts 10:38). Now, the disciples continue with Jesus' ministry.

THE SECOND ARREST OF THE APOSTLES (17-24)

The high priest and Jewish religious leaders are enraged by the popularity Christianity is gaining. They arrest the apostles and put them in prison. As a sign to the Sanhedrin, an angel releases the apostles from prison. The next day, it is reported to the religious leaders that the apostles were found teaching in the temple.

THE APOSTLES THROWN IN JAIL

Act 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,

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,

Those with the high priest are Annas, Caiaphas, and members of the Sanhedrin. We have already seen them in 4:6. The Sadducees are mentioned because of their stand against angels. Interestingly, it is an angel that God will use to deliver the disciples here and on many other occasions.

Act 5:18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

This is the public prison which houses all who have been arrested during the day. They are put in holding cells before they are brought to trial.

ANGELS DELIVER THE APOSTLES

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

5:19 Angels in the NT, ANGELS. There are more direct references to Angels in the NT than in the OT. Jesus talked about angels (Matthew 26:53; Mark 13:32; Luke 20:34-36;

John 1:51); and not only were angels in attendance At His birth, resurrection and ascension, they were active amid the early church's life. In Acts, angelic activity: 1) freed apostles imprisoned for their faith (see also 12:6-7), 2) led Philip to an evangelistic opportunity (8:26), 3) told Cornelius how to find Peter in order to hear the gospel (10:3, 5), 4) struck judgment on wicked Herod (12:23), and 5) encouraged Paul caught in a killer storm (27:23). Throughout the NT, believers are given instruction on the presence, nature, and function of angels, fallen and unfallen (Hebrews 1:14; 1 Peter 1:12; 3:22; Revelation 5:11-12; Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 1:16; 2 Peter 2:4).

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

The angel is not seen by the prisoners or guards who are close by. For the disciples, the angel's presence confirms that God is pleased with their stand for the gospel and their boldness to minister to the sick in the name of Jesus. The angel also instructs them to teach the whole Word of God.

People being born again because of the preaching of the word is only the beginning. They must also be instructed in the whole Word of God so they will become disciples, not just converts.

Act 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.

While the officers of the Sanhedrin are looking for the prisoners in the jail cells, the disciples are already in the temple teaching. Their deliverance is a clear indication of God's attitude toward governments who try to stop the teaching and ministering of the Word of God. It is also a clear teaching on what our attitude should be for government leaders who try to restrain the ministry of the Word.

OFFICERS REPORT TO RELIGIOUS LEADERS

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

Act 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.

The officers explain to the leaders that they had done their job the night before. The prison doors were not only close, safety locks were in place and guards were stationed outside the prison doors. Even though no one was inside the prison, the guards had properly performed their duty. In other words, the only explanation for the prisoners being freed is a miracle.

Act 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.

The leaders of the Sanhedrin are at a loss for words. Their desire is to keep this movement from growing, and they do not know what to do to stop it.

THE THIRD ARREST OF THE APOSTLES (25-27)

When the religious leaders discover the apostles teaching the Word of God in the temple, they arrest them again. Because they fear the crowd's reaction, the captain arrests them quietly.

Act 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.

The leaders of the government are so out of touch with what has taken place, the disciples are already in the temple teaching the Word of God, and they know nothing about it. While these same leaders are preparing to interrogate the disciples, the disciples are in the temple doing the will of God.

Act 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.

The first reaction of the captain and officers is to grab the apostles and make a public display of them. However, they recognize the popularity of the disciples, and the people are gathering by the thousands to hear them speak and see the miracles they are performing.

The captain and officers then decide to arrest them without making a scene. They fear the reaction of the crowd.

The disciples willingly go with the temple guards when they are asked, demonstrating their submissive hearts.

THE APOSTLES BROUGHT BEFORE THE COUNCIL (27-42)

The council confronts the disciples about continuing to preach the gospel. But the disciples make it clear they must obey God. Peter then accuses the religious leaders of crucifying Jesus. The council is so enraged they want the disciples to be put to death immediately. Gamaliel reasons with the council, and the council listens. Again they only threaten the disciples and release them. The disciples rejoiced at the suffering and continue to teach and preach.

INTERROGATION BY THE HIGH PRIEST

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

Notice the question is not “How did you escape from prison?” The council was afraid of the response they would receive if they asked that question. Instead, they interrogate the disciples over preaching in the name of Jesus.

Act 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.

Satan hates the name of Jesus, and religion is backed by Satan and demons. But the name of Jesus has been exalted above them all.

By this time, the teaching of the disciples has saturated Jerusalem and everyone is talking about the words, signs, and wonders of the disciples. Yet these religious leaders believe the disciples are preaching to blame them for the death of Jesus. However, these same leaders had already accepted this blame when Jesus was taken to be crucified (Matthew 27:24-25).

This verse reveals the corruption of the religious leaders. They are more concerned about themselves than the people.

PETER’S RESPONSE

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

The Bible commands us to obey the laws of the land (Romans 13) because government is of the Lord. But when government oversteps its limits and dictates when and where to preach the gospel, believers must go with the Word. When men in authority contradict God’s Word, then and only then do Christians have a right to disobey the law.

Act 5:30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

“Our fathers” includes the religious leaders Peter is addressing. These men defied the will of the God they claimed to serve.

Act 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.

Peter explains that God overrode their decision to crucify Jesus by raising Him up and giving Him the highest position in heaven. Peter is, in essence, saying, “You are not the leaders over

Israel, and your religion does not offer salvation.” Jesus is both leader and savior. He is the only one who can remove sin. He is also savior of the nation of Israel.

Act 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.

Peter and the disciples are natural witnesses. The Holy Spirit is the supernatural witness.

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

The Greek says, “their heart was divided with rage and anger.” While the disciples stood before them, the religious leaders made the decision to put them to death.

GAMALIEL SPEAKS

Act 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;

Gamaliel is a respected Pharisee of his day and is the grandson of Hillel who founded a theological school. Gamaliel has oversight of the school and was one of Paul’s teachers (Acts 22:3). He requests the disciples be removed from the room for a time so he can discuss the issue with others on the Sanhedrin.

Act 5:35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

Act 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.

History (Josephus) tells us that Theudas rose up, caused a small revolution and declared himself to be Messiah. He had approximately four hundred followers. The Romans captured and beheaded him. They left his head on the streets to show the people that Caesar was still Lord. Theudas’s followers quickly scattered.

Act 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.

Judas of Galilee rebelled during the taxation record in Luke 2:1.

Act 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:

Gamaliel is advising the council to remove the pressure and opposition they have against the disciples.

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

Gamaliel's argument and advice:

1. If the movement be of man, it will fall apart by itself. Either God or the men involved will destroy it (i.e. Theudas and Judas).
2. If the movement be of God, the Sanhedrin has placed itself in a position of fighting against God.
3. If it is of God, man cannot stop it.
4. Leave it alone.

Act 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.

The Sanhedrin agrees with Gamaliel while he is standing before them, but still do their best to hinder the disciples. Their new threats will accomplish no more than their previous threats had. The disciples are resolute in their decision to obey God and preach and teach in the name of Jesus even more than they already had been.

THE DISCIPLES DEPART FROM THE COUNCIL

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

The disciples are fulfilling Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; James 1:2. They have learned to "count it all joy" when they fall into trials and tests. They consider it an honor to be persecuted for the name of Jesus. They believe it is a mark of blessing to know they have caused enough damage in Satan's kingdom to be persecuted.

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

The entire congregation meets in the temple, but in every house they meet for meals and fellowship. The persecution does not stop the Word, but it increases the teaching and preaching of it.