

Acts 5

Here in verses 1-2 we have another sacrificial act that looked just as generous as others - as per Barnabas 4:34-37.

Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and apparently gave the proceeds to the new church. **Would there have been any problem with keeping some of the money? Did they have to give any of it to the church? What is the problem?** Ananias' sin was misrepresenting his gift by claiming that it was the total payment that he had received when it was really only a portion of it. He wanted to look good to his peers and the leaders of the church. He was guilty of hypocrisy along with lying and deceit.

How do you explain this? Why did Ananias do it? How did he get to this point (vv. 3-4)? Rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to fill him, Ananias had allowed Satan to control his heart (v. 3).¹ This was clearly a spiritual warfare battle that he lost and the consequences of losing this battle were devastating. Ephesians 6:12: *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* There is a battle going on for our hearts and minds. It is largely invisible but nevertheless very real. **Where do you see this battle going on in your life?**

Peter gave Sapphira an opportunity to tell the truth, but she did not and met the same fate as her husband. **What was the people's reaction (v. 8)?** Great fear in v. 5, 11, 13. They knew they were witnessing God's judgment.

The Bible talks about fearing the Lord in several places (Proverbs 1, 9; Psalms 110, e.g.). **In light of this incident, how would you define what it means to have a healthy fear of the Lord?**

Why did one sin result in such drastic action on the part of God? The punishment doesn't seem to fit the crime.

- This was the first sin within the newly established Christian community and the first sin against the same community. For the first time in the brand new church two persons set out deliberately to deceive their leaders and their friends. God is making a clear and dramatic statement here; hypocrisy, deceit, lying in the new church would be deadly and divisive and will not be tolerated.
- God did this to illustrate how important it is for His people to be holy. **What does holy mean?** Set apart....from the world....for God's purposes. They are not to be like the world.

To further explain what might seem to be an "unfair" judgment on the part of God.....Isaiah 55:8-9: *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*" God has the big picture. We do not.

What does this incident teach us about the nature of our God? He is holy and just. Sin repulses him especially within the body of believers. Our behavior is important to our God.

What's the lesson(s) for us? We need to be men and women of integrity; don't embellish the truth. Ananias was responsible for his decisions. There are consequences to bad decisions. Don't underestimate the power of Satan.

How do you explain v. 13? Because of the fate of Ananias and Sapphira, no pretenders or half-hearted followers were willing to join with the believers. However more and more people were becoming believers on their own outside the group (v. 14).

What was happening in v. 16 News of the apostles' powers was spreading beyond Jerusalem. People from outlying areas were bringing their sick friends to them just as people had brought sick friends to Jesus from miles around.² The apostles were gaining great influence not only in Jerusalem but also in the outlying areas. The increase in visibility, success and popularity of the Apostles was evident. **Any time a work of God is going on, what can you expect??** Opposition, hostility, jealousy, etc. (v. 17). You can expect Satan to show up.

How did the Sadducees react (v. 17)? Filled with jealousy, they put the disciples in jail. The same as (4:3).

Why were the Sadducees jealous? A handful of fishermen/nobody's were healing and breaking the power of evil spirits. Furthermore the love of God, a sense of community, hope, life—these things were being given away for free! And none of the Sadducees or the Council or the important people were getting any credit for it; in fact, they were being ignored. So they were intensely jealous. They were losing their following.

When they brought the apostles back to appear before the Sanhedrin why were they careful not to use force (v. 26)? The apostles were so popular with the people that the captain and his temple police had to be very careful not to create the impression that they were going to harm the apostles. The apostles had become local heroes/celebrities.

The Jewish leaders felt the disciples were unfairly heaping guilt on them for having shed Jesus' blood (v. 28). However, only a few weeks earlier when they were shouting "crucify Him" they had said to Pilate, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25).³ What selective, short memories they had. What hypocrisy!

Now we have another appearance before the Sanhedrin (v. 27). They delivered the same message of 4:18, i.e. not to teach/preach in the name of Jesus (v. 28). **How did Peter respond this time (v. 29)?** Exactly the same as 4:19, "It doesn't matter what you say, we're going to do what God tells us to do."

Application: God says, "tell others about me", while man says, "keep your religion to yourself." **How do you reconcile those two positions in our politically correct world?** The same way the apostles reconciled them. "It doesn't matter what you say, we're going to do what God tells us to do."

How did the Sanhedrin respond (v. 33)? They were furious and wanted to put them to death.

Who intervened (v. 34)? Gamaliel Where else have we heard about Gamaliel? As a Rabbi, he was Saul's chief mentor (22:3). He was the grandson of Rabbi Hillel. Gamaliel was the most respected Pharisee of his day.

After the apostles had left the meeting room, Gamaliel addressed his colleagues. What was Gamaliel's message (vv. 35-39)? He warned his colleagues to do nothing rash. He referred to two similar movements that failed when their leaders had died – Theudas and Judas. As if to say, "Movements and fads come and go. This one will fade away." But he adds the caveat "but if it is from God", which he didn't consider to be a viable possibility. He pointed out that if the apostles were of God, the Sanhedrin would find itself in the position of fighting against God. He was wise and perceptive. Gamaliel proved to be God's instrument for calming the Sanhedrin down and preserving the apostles and perhaps all the early Christians in Jerusalem at this time.

What was the Sanhedrin's final strategy (v. 40)? The same as their strategy in chapter 4 -- they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus.....plus flogging..... probably with 39 lashes (Deuteronomy 25:3; 2 Corinthians 11:24).

How did the apostles respond to the whipping (vv. 41-42)? They went home rejoicing that they had been counted worthy of suffering for Jesus Christ. They considered it an honor to suffer dishonor for the sake of Jesus' name. This treatment did not slow them down at all. They continued teaching and evangelizing daily, publicly in the temple and privately from house to house declaring that Jesus was the Messiah.

Throughout the book of Acts we see the classic poor-leadership example of shooting the messenger. We see no concern about the origin of the message or the substance of the message but rather a desire to kill the one who delivered it. The Prophets also were messengers that fell into the same category. There is no reason why we should expect less from our world.

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Acts, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>) p. 94

² Ibid p. 100

³ Ibid p. 102