

THE CHURCH GROWS DESPITE OPPOSITION

A. The lie of Ananias and Sapphira.

1. ([Acts 5:1-2](#)) What Ananias and Sapphira did.

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. 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.**

a. **But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold**

a possession: After they saw the great generosity of Barnabas and how well he was respected ([Acts 4:36-37](#)), Ananias and Sapphira decided they wanted to receive the same respect.

b. **He kept back part of the proceeds:** They sold the **possession**, and gave only a *portion* to the church, while *implying* that they sacrificially gave it all to the church.

i. The ancient Greek word for **kept back** is *nosphizomai*, which means “to misappropriate.” The same word was used of Achan’s theft in the Greek translation of the Old Testament ([Joshua 7:21](#)). The only other time *nosphizomai* is used in the New Testament, it means to steal ([Titus 2:10](#)).

ii. “The story of Ananias is to the Book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. In both narratives an act of deceit interrupts the victorious progress of the people of God.”

c. **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.

i. “There may indeed be the further implication that Ananias and Sapphira had vowed to give the whole proceeds of the sale to God, but then changed their mind and handed over only part.”

ii. “Once the love of money takes possession of a person, there is no evil that he cannot or will not do.”

iii. According to one commentator, these are the “evils packed under” the sin of Ananias, beyond the mere attempt to deceive God and the church:

- The contempt of God.
- Sacrilegious defrauding.
- Perverse vanity and ambition.

- Lack of faith.
- The corrupting of a good and holy order.
- Hypocrisy.

2. ([Acts 5:3-4](#)) Peter confronts Ananias.

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? 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.”

a. **Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart:** God apparently gave Peter supernatural knowledge of what Ananias had done. This spiritual gift, called *the word of knowledge*, is mentioned in [1 Corinthians 12:8](#).

- i. When Peter said this, Ananias must have been crushed. Certainly he expected praise for his spectacular gift, but was rebuked instead. Peter saw that **Satan** was at work, even through a man numbered among believers like Ananias.
- ii. Because his sin was lusting after public praise for his generosity, it was appropriate that the sin be exposed publicly.

b. **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.

i. 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 (**You have not lied to men but to God**).

c. **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.

i. Of course, his sin was greed (in keeping the money); but his greater sin was *pride*, in wanting everyone to consider him so spiritual that he “gave it all” — when he had not.

ii. 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.

iii. Their great sin was rooted in *pride*. Pride corrupts the church more quickly than anything else.

d. **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.

e. **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.

3. ([Acts 5:5-6](#)) The death of Ananias.

Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*.

a. **Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last:** Peter did not pronounce a death sentence on Ananias. He simply

confronted him with his sin and Ananias fell down dead. It isn't the business of the *church* to pronounce a death sentence on anyone.

i. Peter was probably more surprised than anyone else when Ananias fell down dead. "Observe that Peter said no word to Ananias about his death. The death of Ananias was the act of God." (Morgan).

b. **Fell down and breathed his last:** This was a harsh penalty for a sin that seems to be common today. Some wonder if God was not excessively harsh against Ananias.

i. The greater wonder is that God delays His righteous judgment in virtually all other cases. Ananias received exactly what he deserved; he simply *could not* live in the atmosphere of purity that marked the church at that time.

ii. The physical means for the death of Ananias was perhaps a heart attack caused by sudden shock or terror. He lived in a time and among a people who really believed there was a God in heaven we must all answer to. It frightened him to have his sin exposed and to know he was accountable before God for it. He didn't yawn or debate when confronted with his sin; he **fell down and breathed his last.**

iii. What Ananias did also must be seen in the context of its time.

This was a critical juncture for the early church and such impurity, sin, scandal and satanic infiltration could have corrupted the entire church at its root. “The Church has never been harmed or hindered by opposition from without; it has been perpetually harmed and hindered by perils from within.”

iv. We can surmise that one reason we don't see the same remarkable judgment of God in this way today is because God's church has so many branches. Even if the entire body of Christ in the United States was to become corrupt through scandal or sin, there is plenty of strength in other parts of the tree.

v. “The Church's administration to-day is not what it was, or there might be many dead men and women at the end of some services.”

c. **Fell down and breathed his last:** The shock of being exposed was too much for Ananias. For many Christians in compromise, their greatest fear is not in sinning itself, but in being found out.

i. As much as anything, the lesson of Ananias and Sapphira is that we presume greatly on God when we assume that there is always time to repent, time to get right with God, time to get honest with

Him. Any such time given by God is an undeserved gift that He owes no one; we should never assume it will always be there.

ii. “We must not infer from the rarity of such judgments in this word, or from their solitariness, that God’s mind has changed as to the exceeding sinfulness and hatefulness and ill desert of the sin he has thus rebuked. The solitary example must stand as a lasting and terrible monument of what God thinks of that sin.”

d. **So great fear came upon all those who heard these things:**

God’s purpose was accomplished in the church as a whole. This was evidence of a great work of God among His people.

If this had happened today, we would have had a cover-up committee. Don’t let it get out to the public. You can take heart, this may be a surprise to you, when God exposes things... one of the outcomes was that when God was vindicated, the work gained strength again.

4. **([Acts 5:7-9](#)) Peter confronts Sapphira.**

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.”

a. **How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?** Sapphira was a knowing and willing participant in the sin, as well as the blatant cover-up. God’s judgment of her was just as righteous as His judgment of Ananias.

b. **You have agreed together:** We don’t know if Ananias and Sapphira had a good or a bad marriage, if they agreed often or fought often. We do know that they at least **agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord**. They should have found agreement *for* the Lord, instead of *against* Him.

i. We don’t know if Ananias suggested this or if Sapphira did or they came to the idea 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 does not extend to submitting unto sin.

5. ([Acts 5:10-11](#)) The death of Sapphira.

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.

a. **Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her**

last: 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.

i. 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. But we can see that it is possible for a Christian to *sin unto death* ([1 John 5:16-17](#)), and we have New Testament examples of saved Christians being judged by being “brought home” in death ([1 Corinthians 11:27-32](#)). “True Christians do not lose their salvation by sinning. The punishment of Ananias and Sapphira, though extreme, was for this life only.”

ii. In noticing the comparison between the incident of Ananias and Sapphira and Achan in the Book of Joshua, it is interesting also to look at the contrasts. In Joshua, God expected the people of God

themselves to execute the judgment upon the offender. But in Acts, God took this type of judgment out of the church's hand and did it Himself. This shows that the church has no place in administering such punishment itself or in having civil authorities do so for them.

b. **Great fear came upon all the church:** The name Sapphira means, *Beautiful* in Aramaic. The name Ananias means *God is Gracious* in Hebrew. It might seem that their names contradicted their lives, but we see the beauty and graciousness of God in two significant ways.

i. If Ananias and Sapphira were actually heaven-bound, it shows that God was beautiful and gracious enough to not deny them salvation even for a grievous sin.

ii. The beauty and graciousness of God was seen in the continued blessing of God upon the church. He protected it not only against outside attack, but also against itself. If Ananias and Sapphira were filled with grace, *this would have pleased them*. "Oh Lord, take us to heaven now if You must; but let Your work continue and let Your name be glorified."

iii. This is the first use of the word **church** in the Book of Acts. “The Christian *ekklesia* was both new and old — new, because of its relation and witness to Jesus as Lord and to the epoch-making events of his death, exaltation and the sending of the Spirit; old, as the continuation of the ‘congregation of the Lord’ which had formerly been confined within the limits of one nation, but now, having died and risen with Christ, was to be open to all believers without distinction.”

B. Continuing power in the church.

1. ([Acts 5:12](#)) Power shown through miracles and unity.

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.

a. **Many signs and wonders were done:** In [Acts 4:30](#), we read that these early Christians prayed that God would continue to do **signs and wonders** *through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus*. This shows that this prayer was answered, and these remarkable **signs and wonders** continued.

i. We aren't told what these **signs and wonders** were. Presumably they were like what we see in other places in Acts and in the Gospels — healings, deliverance from demonic powers, unusual blessings.

b. **They were all with one accord**: Often, the fact that God's people are together **all with one accord** is a greater display of the power of the Holy Spirit than any particular sign or wonder. Our selfish hearts and stubborn minds can be harder to move than any mountain.

c. **Through the hands of the apostles**: Seemingly, God chose to do these miraculous works **through the hands of the apostles** and not mainly through others. Yet God wisely chooses which hands will bring a miracle. He had a purpose in doing it **through the hands of the apostles**.

d. **Solomon's Porch**: The second temple was a massive compound, with extensive colonnades and covered areas. No doubt, the early Christians gathered together in a particular area of the temple complex, in an area open to all.

2. ([Acts 5:13-14](#)) The church's reputation and growth.

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.

a. **None of the rest dared join them:** The community of Christians had a marvelous reputation for integrity, and everybody knew it was a serious thing to be a follower of Jesus. An Ananias and Sapphira incident would reduce the level of casual commitment.

b. **And believers were increasingly added to the Lord:** Yet, the church kept growing. Though people knew it was a serious thing to be a Christian, the Spirit of God kept moving with power.

c. **Increasingly added to the Lord:** New believers were added: **Added to the Lord**, not to a “church” or to a person or even to a movement, but to God Himself. They were added in **multitudes**.

i. The mention of **multitudes of both men and women** is Luke’s way of reminding us that the cleansing of the church connected with Ananias and Sapphira did no lasting damage.

3. ([Acts 5:15-16](#)) The expectation of miracles among the early Christians.

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.

a. **They brought the sick out into the streets:** People were so convinced of the reality and power of what the Christians believed, they thought they could be healed by the mere touch of Peter's shadow.

i. **That at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them:** Our text does not specifically say people were healed by Peter's shadow; it merely tells us people thought it would, and they took action based on this belief. We don't know for certain if people were actually healed when **the shadow of Peter** passed over them.

b. **That at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them:** Assuming people were healed, apparently, even **the shadow of Peter** became a point of contact where people released faith in Jesus as healer. It seems that people well understood what Peter said in [Acts 3:12-16](#): That Jesus heals, even if He does His healing work through His apostles.

i. It may sound crazy that one could be healed by the touch of a shadow, but we know a touch of Jesus' clothing healed a woman ([Luke 8:44](#)). There wasn't anything magical in the garment, but it was a way that her faith was released. In the same way, there was no power in Peter's **shadow** itself, but there was power when a person believed in Jesus to heal them, and the passing of Peter's shadow may have helped some to believe.

ii. "It may be significant that the verb *episkiazo*, which Luke chooses, meaning 'to overshadow', he has used twice in his Gospel of the overshadowing of God's presence."

iii. "The idea that shadows had magical powers, both beneficent and malevolent, was current in the ancient world and explains the motivation of the people."

iv. However, we can trust that Luke is not merely recording legends. "From what we know of physicians, even in those days, we cannot assume that Luke would gullibly accept stories of 'miraculous healing' without investigating them."

c. **They were all healed**: However God chose to bring the healing, there is no doubt that a remarkable work of healing was present. We

shouldn't miss the connection between the purity preserved in the first part of the chapter (with the death of Ananias and the fear of God among the Christians) and the power displayed here. God blessed a pure church with spiritual power.

d. **A multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem:**

This is the first mention of the work extending beyond Jerusalem.

People came there instead of the apostles going to them. This was exciting, but not exactly according to the command of Jesus. He told the disciples to go out to *Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth* ([Acts 1:8](#)). The apostles didn't leave Jerusalem until they were forced to by persecution ([Acts 8:1](#), [12:1-2](#)).

C. **The apostles are imprisoned by the Jewish rulers.**

1. ([Acts 5:17-18](#)) **The arrest and imprisonment of the apostles.**

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.

a. **Then the high priest rose up:** The meeting of Peter and John with the religious leaders in [Acts 4:5-22](#) ended well for the early followers