

In Acts chapter 5 we move from the beauty of generous love in the early church to the sobering seriousness of God's holiness. The same Spirit who brings unity and boldness also exposes hypocrisy and purifies Christ's people. This chapter reminds believers that God cares deeply about our integrity, and it calls unbelievers to a clear response to Jesus, who shed His blood for our sins and rose again as Lord.

### **5:1–11 – Ananias, Sapphira, and the deadly seriousness of hypocrisy**

At the end of Acts chapter 4 we saw believers willingly selling property and bringing the proceeds to the apostles so that no one in the church family was in need. It was not forced; it was a voluntary expression of love. It was beautiful spiritually, even though in time it proved to be a financial strain and later required help from Gentile churches.

Into that atmosphere of generosity step Ananias and Sapphira:

*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. (Acts 5:1–2)*

The problem is not that they kept part of the money. Peter makes that clear:

*"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?" (Acts 5:3–4)*

They were not required to sell their land. Even after they sold it, they were not required to give the proceeds. Their sin was not holding back; their sin was pretending. They wanted the reputation of total surrender without the reality of it. They lied, not just to people, but to God Himself:

*"Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." (Acts 5:4)*

Ananias drops dead instantly. Young men wrap him, carry him out, and bury him. About three hours later Sapphira comes in, unaware of what has happened. Peter gives her a chance to tell the truth:

*"Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much." (Acts 5:8)*

She confirms the lie. Peter replies:

*"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." (Acts 5:9)*

She also falls down dead, and the young men carry her out and bury her beside her husband.

Luke adds the obvious:

So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things. (Acts 5:11)

**Key truths here:**

- Giving was voluntary. The early sharing was not a forced communism like modern systems where property is confiscated. It was freewill generosity.
- The sin was hypocrisy—acting as if they had given all, when in fact they held some back while claiming full surrender.
- Peter clearly equates lying to the Holy Spirit with lying to God, showing that the Spirit is truly God.

**Application for believers:**

This passage exposes how dangerous it is to play games with God. Hypocrisy is not a minor flaw; God treats it as deadly. We are all tempted to appear more spiritual than we really are, to talk as if our prayer life, devotion, or giving is deeper than it is. God is not asking for theatrical holiness—He wants honesty and a sincere heart.

A wise prayer is: “Lord, show me where I am pretending. Help me to be the same person in private that I am in public. Cleanse me from hypocrisy and make my devotion to You real.”

**Challenge for believers:**

Are there places where you are making a show of dedication to Christ while secretly holding back? Are you presenting yourself as fully surrendered while secretly clinging to certain sins, motives, or idols? Acts 5 invites you to repentance now, while there is still mercy.

**5:12–16 – A purified church and powerful witness**

With hypocrisy confronted, the church becomes a powerful witness again:

*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. (Acts 5:12–14)*

The church meets openly in the temple area known as Solomon’s Porch. There is reverence and holy fear. Outsiders are almost afraid to attach themselves superficially after what happened to Ananias and Sapphira, yet genuine believers keep coming—“multitudes of both men and women.”

*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. (Acts 5:15–16)*

People begin bringing the sick into the streets, hoping that even Peter’s shadow might pass over them. Luke does not explicitly say the shadow itself healed anyone, but it is clear that many were being healed and delivered. Whether through touch or simple trust, people are using that moment as a point of contact to release faith in Jesus, and God is answering.

**Application for believers:**

When the church takes sin seriously and walks in honesty, love, and unity, its witness becomes powerful. We may not see the same kind of public healings every day, but the principle is the same: God delights to work through a purified and humble people. Ask the Lord to purify your life and your Bible study and prayer group so that His love and power can work more freely through you.

At the same time, we must be careful not to turn God's gifts into a show. The focus in Acts is never on building a personality platform; the focus is on exalting Jesus. Any healing, miracle, or answered prayer should draw attention to Him, not to us.

**5:17–26 – Jealous opposition and a miraculous release**

The more God works, the more opposition rises:

*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. (Acts 5:17–18)*

The high priest and the party of the Sadducees—who did not believe in resurrection, angels, or spirits—are filled with jealousy. They arrest the apostles again and put them in the public jail.

*But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, “Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.” (Acts 5:19–20)*

In the middle of the night, God sends an angel. The doors are opened, the apostles are brought out, and they are told to go right back to the most visible place—the temple—and continue to proclaim “all the words of this life.” No call to run away, no encouragement to hide—just “Go back and preach.”

And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. (Acts 5:21)

At dawn, they are back teaching.

Meanwhile, the high priest and council assemble, unaware that their prisoners are gone. They send officers to bring the apostles from prison:

*“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!” (Acts 5:23)*

The leaders are puzzled and anxious—until someone comes in with a stunning report:

*“Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!” (Acts 5:25)*

God is clearly not intimidated by human chains or human courts.

**Application for believers:**

God may not always send an angel to open a literal prison for us, but He knows how to keep His work going when people try to shut it down. When you obey Him, you may face pushback, but you are never abandoned. Be encouraged: if God wants His word spoken, no authority on earth can ultimately stop Him.

### 5:27–32 – “We must obey God rather than men”

The officers bring the apostles back, carefully this time, because they fear the reaction of the people:

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!” (Acts 5:27–28)

The high priest admits the effectiveness of their witness: “You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine.” He also feels the weight of the apostles’ preaching about Jesus’ crucifixion: “You intend to bring this Man’s blood on us.”

In reality, they had already taken that responsibility when they stirred the crowd and said before Pilate, “His blood be on us and on our children.” Now they don’t like having that truth pressed on their conscience.

*But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”* (Acts 5:29)

The word translated “ought” carries the sense of “must.” Peter is saying, “We must obey God rather than men.” When human authority commands what God forbids, or forbids what God commands, the disciple of Jesus must side with God.

Then Peter once again preaches the core of the gospel:

*“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.”* (Acts 5:30–32)

- They affirm the resurrection: “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus.”
- They speak plainly of guilt: “whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.”
- They declare Jesus’ exaltation: “God has exalted Him to His right hand.”
- They proclaim His role: “Prince and Savior,” the One who gives repentance and forgiveness of sins.
- They testify as eyewitnesses, and they affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness as well, given to those who obey God’s call to believe and turn to Christ.

### Application for believers:

There may come moments when obedience to Jesus puts you at odds with culture, coworkers, or even authorities. Acts 5 helps settle the issue in your heart ahead of time: Who will you obey when there is a clash—people or God? Ask the Lord to plant in you that same conviction: “I must obey God rather than men.”

### 5:33–40 – Gamaliel’s counsel

The council is furious:

*When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them. (Acts 5:33)*

But a respected Pharisee named Gamaliel stands up:

*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. (Acts 5:34)*

He reminds them of two previous movements—Theudas and Judas of Galilee—leaders who gathered followers, then died, and their movements collapsed. His conclusion is simple:

*“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.” (Acts 5:38–39)*

His reasoning is cautious rather than bold faith, but God uses it to protect the apostles. The council agrees—partially:

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. (Acts 5:40)

They do not leave them alone; they beat them, threaten them again, and then release them.

### 5:41–42 – Joy in suffering and unstoppable witness

The apostles’ reaction is stunning:

*So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. (Acts 5:41)*

They do not come out bitter, defeated, or ashamed. They rejoice—not in pain itself, but in the honor of suffering for Jesus. The threats have the opposite of their intended effect:

*And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:42)*

They keep going—publicly in the temple and privately from house to house. They **preach** Jesus to the lost and **teach** believers so that they grow strong in the faith. Persecution cannot silence a church that is full of the Spirit and anchored in Christ.

### Application for believers:

What does it take to stop you from talking about Jesus—awkwardness, disapproval, criticism, or perhaps real loss? The apostles show us another way: they saw suffering for Christ as a privilege, not a disaster. Ask the Lord to so fill your heart with love for Jesus that, even when you pay a price for following Him, you can still rejoice that you are counted worthy to bear His name.

## A challenge and an invitation

### For believers:

Acts chapter 5 presses hard questions into our lives:

- Are you walking honestly before God, or are you acting out a version of yourself that is more spiritual than the truth?
- Are you willing to obey God when it costs you—reputation, comfort, convenience, even safety?
- Do you long for God’s power and presence enough to let Him purify and correct you, not just bless you?

God does not expose hypocrisy to destroy us, but to bring us to repentance and deeper freedom. If the Spirit has put His finger on something in your life—an act, an attitude, or a pattern of pretending—respond today. He stands ready to forgive, cleanse, and restore you because Jesus shed His blood on the cross for your sins and rose again to give you new life.

### For non-believers or those unsure where they stand:

Acts 5 shows that Jesus is not just a teacher from the past. He is alive, exalted at the right hand of God as Prince and Savior, the One who gives repentance and forgiveness of sins. Your problem is not simply lack of information; your deepest need is to be reconciled to God.

The good news is that God has already acted in love. Jesus went to the cross and willingly shed His blood to pay for your sins. God raised Him from the dead, declaring that He truly is God, Savior, and Lord. He now calls you to turn from your sin and trust Him.

You can respond in your own words, but a prayer like this may express your heart:

*“Lord God, I admit that I have sinned against You. I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for my sins, shedding His blood for me, and that You raised Him from the dead. I turn from my sin and I ask You to forgive me. I receive Jesus as my Savior and Lord. Take my life, change my heart, and help me to follow You from this day forward.”*

The words themselves do not save you, but the living Jesus does. If you truly turn to Him in faith, He will forgive you, give you His Spirit, and begin a new work in your life. The same risen Lord who empowered the believers in Acts will walk with you as you learn to obey Him, day by day.