

=THE BOOK OF ACTS=
Lesson 5
Ananias and Sapphira - Acts 5

TEXT: Acts 5:1-11

AIM: to teach my students to regard the truth with the same respect as does the Lord.

BACKGROUND: Review the first four chapters of the book of Acts very rapidly, explaining that the Holy Spirit has been poured out without measure, every believer now being indwelt by the Holy Spirit and having access to His power! Discuss very rapidly the events of Acts 2:42-47, telling of the work of the Apostles and the people of the local church doing the work of the Lord. Then describe the church and the events of Acts 4:32-37, which describe the place where the offense in Acts 5 took place. Tell the story very quickly of Ananias and Sapphira, who had been led of the Holy Spirit to sell some property and to give the money to the Lord's work and then decided later to give only a portion of the money. Tell of God's action upon them.

I. WHERE THE OFFENSE TOOK PLACE. See Acts 4:32-37.

1. A united people. In Acts 4:32, we learn that they "...were of one heart and of one soul...." Here were people who were concerned about witnessing and concerned about people being saved. Here were people whose heart and soul were one. (Spend a few minutes telling your students that always there will be things that the church starts to do that they will not understand, but because it is the Lord's business, they should be of one mind with the body of the church in doing those things that need to be done, whether they understand or not.) Throughout the Bible, God spoke to one man who was the leader (as was the case with Moses, Gideon, Joshua and other great leaders), who in turn was the instrument that passed the message on to the people.
2. A selfless people. Read Acts 4:32b, 34 and 35. These were a people who owned private property; and yet they did not consider it as being their own, for when a need developed, they were willing to sell the property, whatever they owned, and give it where it was needed the most. This is a day and time when many people are saying that the Lord does not intend for people to own private property. The Bible nowhere teaches that all of our goods are to be placed in a common pool and that we are to live out of that pool. The Lord intends for each of us to have a certain something for which we are responsible. Yet, we are not to consider it as our own. Remember the parable of the talents. The talents in reality were money that had been given to each of the individuals, and they were responsible for increasing that. These people owned property, but they did not consider it as being theirs.
3. An empowered people. In Acts 4:33, we read the words, "And with great power..." These were people who, with one desire, were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Lord used them and blessed them. (Dwell a moment here on the fact that there is no person in this age who cannot be strong spiritually that he does not need the filling of the Holy Spirit; nor are there any, regardless of their background or circumstances, who cannot be filled and empowered if they are willing to do and to be that which the Lord would have them to be.)
4. A shocked, fearful people when the sin had to be punished. In Acts 5:5 and 11, we read two times that "great fear came...." on all. You will note that throughout the Bible the first time that a sin occurs, or when a sin occurs in a place where the Lord is doing a work or beginning a work, it seems like it is punished with more expediency than at other times. The Lord knows that if a church is to be pure, it must be started pure. When something first begins, this is the time to concentrate the hardest on the purity. Here is a good place to concentrate on telling our new converts to work every work of the Lord into their lives—baptism, church membership, Wednesday night service, Sunday morning service, Sunday night service, Sunday school—all of these things. Just as a little newborn babe needs more feeding in the early part of life, so does a new Christian need feeding in the early part of his life. (Dwell also upon the fact that the Lord is jealously protective of His work and will not permit anyone to cause a disturbance or to cause an upset that would be a deterrent to the work. If it is a case of an individual going or the work suffering, the individual must go.)

II. WHAT WAS THE OFFENSE? See Acts 5:3 and 4. Peter said they lied to the Holy Spirit. We assume the Holy Spirit had convicted them of the necessity of giving this money to the Lord's business. They had agreed and then later changed their minds. (You might spend a moment here asking the people in the class if there has ever been a

time that the Holy Spirit has convicted them of the necessity of doing something that has not been done. Suggest that immediately they do that which they had promised the Lord they would do.) The offense was lying to the Holy Spirit. Once again, there was no law that said that they had to give, except there was a personal conviction by the Holy Spirit. Some believe that the events in Acts 4:36 and 37, when Barnabas sold his property, were in reality a man getting right with the Lord. Barnabas, as a Levite, technically was not permitted to hold title to property, and his selling it and bringing it to the feet of the Apostles could have been again a personal conviction. In those two verses, a person with a personal conviction was doing what was right. This is immediately followed by two being personally convicted of their sin and doing that which was wrong. (Spend a few minutes telling your class of the results in the life of Barnabas. Remind them that in the beginning he was the leader in the team of Barnabas and Paul. Compare that to the wasted life here when these two people were killed.) It is an impossibility to start out a Christian life without it being spiritually pure and have it come to any real usage for the Lord.

III. WHAT BROUGHT ON THE OFFENSE?

1. Selfishness. Ananias and Sapphira must have felt that they had a need for the money that they held back. Anytime we feel that we have a need that is greater than God's need for that which we have, we are selfish.
2. Permitting another to lie. In Acts 5:1, 2 we are told that Ananias and Sapphira had discussed what they were planning to do. It is possible that the moment that one of them even suggested doing wrong, had the other said, "That is not what the Lord would have us to do," it would have put a stop to it there. (Dwell here a moment upon keeping our eyes and ears open for a hint from others that they are about to engage in some sin, and then about our responsibility to "nip it in the bud" as soon as it begins to come to light.)
3. A desire for glory. The time comes that we begin to want people to see us and to know what we are doing. This is the time when we are dangerously close to getting completely off the track for the Lord.
4. Failing to do as a group. You will notice in Acts 2:45 and Acts 4:34 that the people sold their property, feeling that there was a need, and brought the money to the Apostles to distribute. Had Ananias and Sapphira joined in the group and worked in unison with them, there would not have been this desire to glorify self that caused this particular sin or was used to lead up to this particular sin.
5. A lack of Christian fellowship on the part of Ananias and Sapphira. You will note in verse 7 that three hours after the death of her husband, Sapphira came in, not knowing what had been done. We know from verse 5 that they had discussed it, for "great fear came on all them that heard it." She had not been in close fellowship with other Christians, or she would have surely known about what was happening.

IV. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OFFENSE?

1. Two lives were cut short. Think of all the good that could have been done by this man and woman who must have been industrious, must have been accepted in the local church, and must have been saved. They lost the rest of their allotted time because of committing a sin, and the Lord had to expose it for the good of the church as a whole.
2. The shame of the sin. In the years to come, every time Acts 5 is read, the names of Ananias and Sapphira are spoken as two who were killed by the Lord because of their sin. (Impress upon your students here that when we sin, the things that we do that are evil are long remembered after people forget the good that we do.)

- V. THE RESULTS OF THE OFFENSE. Acts 5:11a, "And great fear came upon all the church." One good thing occurred from all of this. A church should be known for its stand on sin and for the power of the Holy Spirit within that church. May God impress upon us a holy respect for the local church. May God impress upon us that, along with murder and thievery and all of the other so-called "awful" sins, the sin of lying is just as much an abomination to God. In the same breath, when He spoke the commandments and said, "Thou shalt not kill," He also said, "Thou shalt not bear false witness." What a tremendous place to impress upon our students that a lie is not a big lie or a little lie any more than a murder is a big murder or a little murder—but a lie is a lie!