

Sunday, July 13, 2025 | Filled

Week 15 | Acts 5:1-11 | “Warts and All, Part 2”

**READ:** Acts 5:1-11 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, <sup>2</sup> and with his wife's knowledge, he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. <sup>3</sup> But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? <sup>4</sup> While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” <sup>5</sup> When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. <sup>6</sup> The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

<sup>7</sup> After an interval of about three hours, his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup> And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.” <sup>9</sup> But Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” <sup>10</sup> Immediately, she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in, they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. <sup>11</sup> And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

As we discussed last week, the NT presents the church, warts, and all. On the one hand, we have exemplary individuals like Barnabas, who selflessly sell off their possessions to aid those in need within the church. On the other hand, not every believer was filled with such noble aspirations. As we'll see today, Ananias and Sapphira are a couple who've left an indelible mark on church history. Their shady dealings have served as a cautionary tale for thousands of years. Just as Barnabas stands as an example to *follow* (Ac. 4:36-37), this couple stands as an example to *avoid*.

I want you to notice two things:

**i. Vs. 32-37 – Believers Behaving Bountifully**

**So, what's the takeaway?** Great benevolence toward the family of God and great allegiance to the word of God pave the way for great assistance from God.

**ii. 5:1-11 - Believers Behaving Badly**

**Vs. 1-2** – Unlike Barnabas, not everyone in the early church behaved admirably. Luke says that "a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet." The Greek word Luke uses for "kept back" isn't as innocent as it might appear. In fact, it's a rare word, and of its three usages in the Bible, all are negative. Aside from this passage, Paul uses it in Titus 2:10 when he tells slaves not to steal from their masters. And, most telling, it is used in Josh 7:1 to describe how Achan stole some of the things that were "devoted" to the Lord.

To be clear, what Ananias did wasn't, in and of itself, wrong. They did not embezzle or pilfer public funds.<sup>1</sup> Nor did they steal from God. Be that as it may, Luke's use of this word still puts them in a not-so-very-favorable light. While their actions are blatantly wrong to the casual observer, he's showing that their financial dealings are far from above board.

Ananias was the leader in this scheme. He is the one who "sold a piece of property." But Luke is at pains to show that he acted "with his wife, Sapphira." And though Ananias is the one who literally "kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet," he did so "with his wife's knowledge." So, while Ananias was the mastermind, Sapphira was his accomplice and a classic enabler. Admittedly, it's possible that the Ananias pressured his wife. But nothing in the text seems to suggest coercion. And as we'll see, it becomes clear that Sapphira was in on the scheme from the very beginning; she was just as corrupt as her husband. So, while, yes, Ananias had the lion's share of the blame. There was enough blame to go around. Both were culpable. And the Lord will deal with both in due time.

**Vs. 3** – The couple thought they had everyone fooled, but they could not fool the Holy Spirit. As Ananias was laying his offerings down, the lead Apostle asked him, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?" Peter uses the same word as Luke when he says, "to keep back." But this time, we get some more information. Keeping back a "part of the proceeds of the land" was, in some way, a "lie to the Holy Spirit." In other words, there was an element of deception in their actions. Even though they had just laid an offering down at the disciples' feet, Ananias wasn't as honest as he appeared to be. Something about this offering was deceptive.

And this lie did not originate from God, but "Satan filled [his] heart." Does this mean that Christians can be possessed by demons? No. But it does mean that they can influenced by the

<sup>1</sup> Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. 2000. In A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (<https://ref.ly/res/LLS:46.30.18/2024-08-01T21:04:24Z/5382084?len=99>), 3rd ed., 679. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Devil. Even the hearts of believers can be filled with demonic desires (e.g., lying, cheating, adultery, murder, etc.). Just because a person is Christian does not mean they are immune to the influences of the world.

Paul told the Galatians, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). The company you keep impacts the pathway you take. If you walk according to the Spirit’s leading, you’ll gratify the Lord rather than the flesh. But if you walk according to the Devil’s leading, you’ll gratify the flesh rather than the Lord.

**Vs. 4** – Peter points out that Ananias’ actions weren’t just sinful; they were nonsensical. He says, “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”

Peter makes three points:

Firstly, Ananias was not forced to sell his property. He could have kept 100% of the land and been perfectly within his rights to do so. As discussed last week, the early church was not a socialist society (e.g., the Qumran/Essenes Community).<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, Ananias was not forced to give away the earnings from the sale. Peter points out that all the proceeds were at his “disposal.” Again, if he wanted to keep 100% of the money, he would’ve been perfectly within his rights to do so!

Lastly, Ananias might’ve been able to fool man, but he could not fool God. Speaking rhetorically, Peter even asked, “Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?” Whatever Ananias thinks, God sees. Ananias had not “lied to man but to God.” And to lie to God is irrational because it is impossible to fool the Omniscient One.

**Vs. 5-6** – Luke says, “When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last...[And] the young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.” Ananias died for nothing more egregious than a lie. Make no mistake, dear Christian, lying is a serious infraction to God. So much so that God made not lying one of the top ten commandments: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex. 20:16). As Christians, we must adhere to the clear teaching of Scripture. To ignore it is to place ourselves

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<sup>2</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Essenes,” in Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 719, “When a new member joined the Essenes, he turned over all property to the community. The individual members were without goods, property, or homes.”

in the hands of an angry God. This passage ought to instill in us a healthy sense of fear. In fact, three other passages illustrate just how seriously God takes his rules:

1. Lev. 10:1-2 – Nadab and Abihu offer "strange fire" and are burned alive.
2. 2 Sam. 6:1-15 – God kills Uzzah for touching the ark (cf. Ex. 25:12-14; Num. 4:15; 7:9).
3. 1 Cor. 11:30 – Some believers were sick, and others had died because they partook of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner.

It has often been said, "Christianity isn't about rules; it's about a relationship." But that simply isn't true. Yes, God's rapport with us is not based on our works; salvation is a freely given gift accepted by faith in Christ Jesus. However, as a good father, God expects his children to obey (cf. Jn. 14:15). He cares about both relationships and rules. So much so that should someone reject his Son, not wanting anything to do with him, there are consequence: Hell. Likewise, should a believer disregard God's rules, desiring to live life according to their own standards, there are consequences: judgement.

**Vs. 7-8** – Three hours pass, and Sapphira comes in, "not knowing what had happened" to her husband. And Peter asks her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." The fact that Peter asks explicitly about the amount demonstrates that the Ananias and Sapphira's sin wasn't that they kept back part of the earnings but that they lied about how much they actually sold the property for. From their perspective, it was a win-win. They got the prestige and profit. People would think they were generous and they didn't have to give away all of their earnings. But this is a deadly mistake.

At this point, Sapphira had a chance to own up to her mistakes. Had she done so, she might've avoided what was coming. Instead, she doubles down on the lie, saying, "Yes, for so much." She wasn't going to admit that she and her husband had deceived the church. That would've destroyed their reputation. She'd be ashamed, and her husband would be exposed as a fraud.

**Vs. 9-10** – "But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out. Immediately, she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in, they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband."

How did Sapphira "test the Spirit of the Lord?" Perhaps they thought she could fool the Holy Spirit, not realizing he was God and, thus, incapable of being fooled. Or, maybe she thought that the grace offered through Jesus Christ gave her a license to sin (cf. Rom. 6:1-2). She knew that God would disapprove of her actions, but she didn't think she'd be judged so harshly for it.

Whatever the specifics of this test, the point is that it is always unwise to put God to the test (cf. Deut. 6:16; Matt. 4:5-7).

Also, herein lies two lessons for married couples.

First, husbands, as you lead, your wife will follow. Are you leading her to the Lord or to the Devil?

Second, wives, you do not have to follow your husband into sin. It is far better to betray your husband to honor the Lord than to honor your husband and betray the Lord (e.g., David, Nabal, and Abigail).

**Vs. 11** – Again, Luke tells us that “great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. Repent before it’s too late. The fear of God is an acute awareness of God’s habitual displeasure with sin and eventual discipline of sin.

Twice, we’re told that “great fear came upon all who heard” about the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. Their bad example and quick demise instilled a sense of reverence in the church. Sin in the faith community is abhorrent to the Lord; it so sickens him that it must be dealt with.

Thankfully, God is patient with liars, giving them ample time to repent (cf. Rom. 2:4). Not everyone who lies gets instantaneously killed. But make no mistake, whether judgment comes now or later, it cannot be avoided. We’ll have to give an account of every word we’ve spoken and every deed we’ve done (e.g., The Judgment Seat of Christ vs. The Great White Throne Judgment).

It is interesting that the first time Luke uses the term “church,” he uses it in the context of church discipline. The church is a place where believers gather to worship God and encourage one another. But it is also a place where its members hold each other accountable (cf. G. 6:1-2; 1 Jn. 5:16-17). And it is in situations of church discipline when the Lord is most obviously present (cf. Matt. 18:15-20). And it seems the early church wasn’t really the church until it took strides to purify the church.

**So, what’s the takeaway?** Feigning virtue before others is vile before God.

**READ:** Luke 12:1-3 (ESV)

“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

Lewis Sperry Chafer, co-founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary, famously said, "It may be a secret sin on earth, but it is open scandal in heaven."

**Video Description:****Filled | Week 15 | “Warts and All, Pt. 2” (Acts 5:1-11)**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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**Sermon Manuscript:**

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