

## Acts 5

Acts four closes recounting the sacrifice and love that brethren had for each other, mentioning especially Barnabas, who having a field, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet to be distributed as relief among saints who were in need. Acts five tells of the hypocrisy of a couple who were disciples and of the results of that hypocrisy.

Doubtlessly moved by the exemplified sacrifice of others, Ananias and Sapphira sold a certain possession they had. Like others they brought the money to lay it at the apostles' feet, but their hearts were not right. They wanted credit for doing something they had not done. They kept back part of what they received for the sale of the property and pretended that what they gave was all they had received. Their deception might have gone unnoticed save for the Holy Spirit who searches all hearts, and who revealed to Peter what they had feigned to do.

The gifts of early disciples were free and voluntary. It was not required that all the disciples sell their possessions, nor were they required to give the whole sum when they did sell some property. Peter's questions to Ananias show this to be the case: "While it remained, did it not remain thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in your power?" (Acts 5:4). Clearly the decision whether to give or not to give rested solely with the one with property. This couple's sin was not that they gave less than God required of them, but that they pretended to give something they had not given. They had lied unto the Holy Spirit (God) whether they were fully conscious of that sin or not.

In every age in which God has dealt with men (Patriarchal, Mosaic or Christian) God has shown the gravity of sin: the violation of His Law. Adam and Eve died for eating the fruit God commanded they should not eat, Nadab and Abihu died for offering strange fire, and Ananias and Sapphira died for lying to the Holy Spirit. Through the ages many have committed the same or similar sins as each of these six but were not immediately punished for that crime. The deaths of each of these in the respective age in which they lived, serve as a warning from God regarding sin, and because He is no respecter of persons, all others who commit sin will suffer appropriate punishment.

The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira brought fear upon the church, caused respectful restraint on the part of those outside the church and drew brethren closer together with one accord in Solomon's porch. God was

magnified through the signs and wonders he did through the apostles. Peter was so esteemed that the sick and lame were laid in the way he might travel if perchance just his shadow should fall upon them. They were healed, everyone (Acts 5:12-16).

The popularity of the movement and of the apostles caused old jealousies and enmities to spring to life. Saducees once more laid hands on the Apostles and put them in prison, only for them to be released by an angel who instructed them to "go, stand in the temple and speak all the words of this life" (Acts 5:2). Next morning, the disappearance of the apostles from prison with all doors securely locked and guards stationed at their respective posts caused the rulers to be much perplexed. Then came the news that the Apostles were preaching in the temple. Speedily officers were sent to rearrest the apostles, but they were brought without violence because the officers feared the multitudes: the apostles were held in great esteem by them.

The High Priest charged the Apostles with willfully ignoring their command to teach no more in the name of Jesus. The apostles did not deny their charges, but claimed they were in subjection to a higher ruler than they: "We must obey God rather than men," they said. Once more the apostles charged the rulers with killing Jesus and once more they reiterated the hated doctrine (as the Saducees viewed it) of the resurrection of Christ.

The boldness of the apostles, coupled with their obvious intention of paying no heed to the edict of the Saducees ignited even more anger and hatred. Only the advice of Gamaliel, a doctor of law held in honor by all the people, quelled their madness. They released them, but not without giving them a good flogging before they did. Their charge to them remained the same, "Speak no more in the name of Jesus," but these Saducees could have held little hope their commands would be heeded. These "ignorant and unlearned" men moved with a conviction not found among them, and the beating only caused "them to rejoice that they were worthy to suffer dishonor for his name." And so, "every day in the temple and from house to house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

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