

Exploring Acts

The Continuing Ministry of Jesus Christ
Through the Holy Spirit

Lesson 5

Day One: Purity, Power and Persistence

As Acts 5 opens, the spirit of giving continues with the believers experiencing a time of great power and great grace. Thousands of Jews that had come to celebrate Pentecost had received the message of the gospel and were converted to Christ. The needs of the many who had lingered in Jerusalem to become instructed and grounded in God's Word were met by those Christians that had sold their belongings and pooled their resources. Each gave of what they had to see that no one lacked. It was a time for great rejoicing, with all who believed being of one heart and one soul and having all things in common such as had never been before.

Into this time of growth as a church family, Luke introduces the first instance of hypocrisy and betrayal of unity. The story in our chapter this week and the startling outcome may at first seem shocking to us, but in the end it is a lasting reminder of God's holiness and His high standard for His church. We also witness the continued signs and wonders being performed by the apostles and their persistence to remain true to their calling to preach Jesus as the Christ.

Read Acts 5:1–42.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer. Come to your time of study expectant to receive something from the Lord. Write down your first impressions.

Memory verse: Romans 1:16 Write out the verse; repeat it daily to commit it to memory.

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation
for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*

VV. 1–11: The word “but” in v. 1, points out the contrast between the gift Barnabas gave at the end of chapter 4 and that of Ananias and his wife Sapphira. Like Barnabas, they also sold a piece of property in order to donate the proceeds to the church.

1. Peter clearly points out in v. 4 that withholding a portion of the proceeds for themselves was not a sin. What was their sin?

The believer’s giving was not compulsory, it was voluntary. Nowhere do we see in scripture where they were commanded to give everything to the church. New Testament teaching instructs Christians to give voluntarily (2 Corinthians 9:7).

2. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Peter confronted Ananias. Who did Peter say had tempted Ananias’ to lie? To *whom* did he lie?
3. In your opinion, why would someone lie to God? What would they intend to gain?

Day Two: Deeper Discoveries

Review Acts 5:1–11.

Verse 3 states that Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit; v. 4 says that he lied to God. This is a confirmation of the deity of the Holy Spirit—He is One with God. It is also affirms the fact that the Holy Spirit is not merely a force or influence; He is a Person—One that can be sinned against.

- a. Acts 5:5–6: What lesson do you derive in these verses? What personal application?

- b. Acts 5:7–9: What is the lesson? What is the personal application?

- c. Acts 5:10–11: What is the lesson repeated in these verses? The personal application?

- d. A little investigation reveals that the name Ananias means “God is gracious;” and Sapphira means “beautiful.” Do *you* think Ananias and Sapphira were true believers? Why or why not? _____

The complete narrative of this story seems to indicate that both Ananias and Sapphira were indeed Christians and a part of the church family. It is important to point out that Luke does not make mention that they were condemned to eternal punishment for their sin. Most commentators seem to agree that they were saved and their death was their judgment (1 John 5:16–17) for their sin but that they will inherit eternal life.

- e. Has God lowered His standard for purity or unity? Given the same circumstance in the church today, what do you think would be the outcome? Why?

God's desire is for a pure church and He is willing to judge people to have it. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (James 4:8, 10).

- f. What word of warning is there for believers in 1 Peter 4:17? What does this mean to you right now?

- g. What word of truth and hope do you find in 1 John 1:7–10?

Your effectiveness as a witness is closely linked to being a vessel that is clean and set apart for Him. Keep short accounts with God, daily confessing your sin and receiving His forgiveness. "It is written, 'Be holy for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:16; Leviticus 19:2).

Day Three: Power and Persistence

Review Acts 5:12–32.

Now that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira had been dealt with, the church was again in one accord. What did we learn from their example? That church discipline is key to not only purifying but also evangelizing the church. Luke stopped counting heads in numbers as the church exploded, referring to them as "multitudes of men and women" (v. 14). The people were gathered together in Solomon's Porch, where earlier Peter had preached and where Jesus gave His discourse (John 10) on His sheep hearing His voice. Could we say that these believers were uncompromising holy? Absolutely! Think about it . . . is there a cost to discipleship?

You decide by reading and briefly summarizing what Jesus had to say . . .

1. Matthew 10:32–39 _____

2. Luke 9:57–62 _____

Jesus doesn't want a partial commitment, He wants your total commitment. In other words, He wants ALL of you! A church made up of committed followers will become a powerful persistent army of witnesses to the watching world.

Enter the opposition (same crowd as in Acts 4), who again imprisons the apostles.

3. Briefly recap the surprising twist no one saw coming in verses 19–20.

“Go stand . . . and speak . . . all the words of this life.” The Greek word used for “life” in v. 20 is *zoe*, often used as a synonym for the Lord Jesus (see John 1:4 and 1 John 1:1–2).

4. When brought again before the council and the high priest, with what were the apostles charged? How did they respond? vv. 28–29

5. By now they knew that not only were they witnesses, who else were they assured was with them? v. 32

6. Once again (as in Acts 4), we see an example when Christians must put God's authority above that of governmental authority. When again (remind yourself) is civil disobedience permissible and even appropriate?

Day Four: Are You For or Against Him?

Review Acts 5:33–42.

The high office Gamaliel occupied suggests that he was not a newcomer to public life. He most likely was present when the Lord Jesus appeared before the same council. He may even have been an eyewitness to the dreadful events that had taken place in Jerusalem. Could it be that he rose to his feet to address his peers because he became inwardly disturbed and possibly even fearful due to the death and resurrection of Christ, and now the transformed lives of His disciples? Luke records that he was a man of intelligence and honesty, a teacher who understood Jewish law and was respected by all. The Apostle Paul acknowledged him as his own teacher (Acts 22:3); one honored to the degree that he was referred to as “Rabban,” meaning *our teacher*, a title higher than that of “Rabbi,” meaning *my teacher*.

1. What are *your* initial impressions of this religious leader Gamaliel? What about him stands out to you?
 - a. Was Gamaliel *for* or *against* the apostles?

At first glance, it may appear difficult to discern whether Gamaliel was for or against them. He obviously feared God and dared to address a position that was directly opposed to the rest of the council. And he intervened with reason and persuasive speech on behalf of the apostles. It would, however, seem that he was taking a middle-of-the-road, wait and see position. There does not appear to be any evidence that he was a believer in Christ.

2. Do *you* think it is possible to be Christian and at the same time have a middle-of-the-road attitude about Jesus? Why or why not?
3. What does Jesus himself say about this in Matthew 12:30a?
 - a. How about Revelation 3:15–16?
 - b. Do the verses you have just read leave room for middle ground?
4. State your own reasons for taking a strong stand for Christ. How would exhibiting your convictions potentially affect you? What would it reveal to the rest of the world?

Day Five: Selah . . . Pause and Ponder the Week in Review

This section of the lesson is intended to be an at-a-glance, user-friendly recap of what you've learned this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark what stands out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share in your discussion group.

1. What is your take-away-truth? How are you working to make it a part of your daily walk?

2. Write out this week's verse from memory.

3. What does this week's verse reveal to you?

4. Personal: Which area is God currently working into your life: *purity–power–persistence*? Compose a prayer today asking Him to help you apply it.

Prayer Time: Write down the people in your group to keep in prayer this next week.
