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## **Acts 5 - The Purified Church and the Persecuted Church**

### **Opening Prayer:**

Father, we thank You for Your Word. Your Word is living and active. It corrects us, strengthens us, and draws us closer to Jesus. Lord, as we study Acts chapter 5, purify our hearts. Guard Your church. Teach us how to walk in integrity and courage. May we not only hear Your Word, but obey it. Speak to us now by Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Historical Setting:**

Acts chapter 5 takes place in the earliest days of the church in Jerusalem. This is only weeks or months after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Pentecost has already occurred in Acts 2. Thousands

have been saved. The apostles are preaching daily in the temple courts.

The Roman Empire rules politically. The Jewish Sanhedrin rules religiously. The Sadducees dominate temple authority. The Pharisees are leading teachers of the Law. The high priestly family is powerful...but threatened.

Christianity is not yet called “Christianity.” It is seen as a Jewish sect centered on “Jesus of Nazareth,” whom the leaders crucified. Yet instead of disappearing, the movement is exploding.

And in Acts 5, Satan launches a two-branched attack:

1. Deception from within
2. Persecution from without

This is what Jesus says about Satan...

In **John 8:44**, Jesus is speaking directly to a group of **unbelieving Jewish religious leaders** who were opposing Him.

***John 8:44 NIV<sup>44</sup> You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.***

- Satan is both liar and murderer (**John 8:44**).

And we will see both Strategies here in Acts.

## **I. Opposition from Within (Acts 5:1-16)**

### **1. The Deception - Verses 1-2**

**Acts 5:1 NIV Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, 🖐️ suh-FYE-ruh also sold a piece of property.**

The church had been voluntarily sharing possessions. In Acts 4, Barnabas sold land and laid the money at the apostles' feet.

Ananias and Sapphira 🖐️ **suh-FYE-ruh** wanted the reputation of sacrifice without the reality of sacrifice.

Peter later makes it clear in verse 4:

**Acts 5:4 NIV<sup>4</sup> Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."**

Their sin was not withholding money. Their sin was **hypocrisy**.

They wanted applause.

This is the serpent in the garden again.  
Satan whispers:

- “Appear spiritual.”
- “Protect your image.”
- “Gain recognition.”

Jesus warned about this in **Matthew 6:1**  
***NIV “Be careful not to practice your  
righteousness in front of others to be  
seen by them. If you do, you will have no  
reward from your Father in heaven.***

👉 Hypocrisy kills revival.

In church history, every true awakening has required purity. During the Welsh Revival of 1904, public confessions broke out. Sins were confessed openly. The church was cleansed.

God cares more about purity than popularity.

## 2. The Discovery - Verses 3-4

Peter says:

***Acts 5:3 NIV<sup>3</sup> Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?”***

Notice something powerful here.

Peter says they lied to the Holy Spirit .... and then in verse 4 he says:

***Acts 5:4 NIV<sup>4</sup> Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”***

This is not a minor overstatement. This is spiritual corruption.

👉 **Sin** always begins in the heart. Nobody else knew their plan. **But God knew.**

**Hebrews 4:13 says: <sup>13</sup> Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.**

👉 We may hide from people.

👉 We never hide from God.

Peter exercises Spirit-given discernment. Jesus had given authority to bind and loose **Matthew 16:19 NIV <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**”).

But this is not Peter's power .... this is divine exposure.

👉 The church must be Spirit-led.

Paul warned in Acts 20:29-30 that from among the believers, men would arise to distort the truth. **Acts 20:29-30 NIV<sup>29</sup> I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.<sup>30</sup> Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.**

The greatest threat to the church is not Hollywood.

Not politics.

Not atheism.

It is hidden **sin** from within.

### 3. The Deaths - Verses 5-11

Verse 5 **Acts 5:5 NIV<sup>5</sup> When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And**

**great fear seized all who heard what had happened.**

Three hours later, Ananias' wife Sapphira 🖐️ **suh-FYE-ruh** enters. She repeats the lie. She falls dead.

This shocks us.

...Why so severe?

Because this is the birth of the church.

**NOTE:** At the beginning of Israel's conquest of Canaan, Achan's 🖐️ **AY-kan(Day-Can)** sin in **Joshua chapter 7** became a huge lesson about hidden disobedience. After the victory at Jericho, God had commanded that everything devoted to destruction was not to be taken for personal use. But Achan secretly kept a beautiful Babylonian garment, silver, and gold, ... He hid them in his tent. His **private sin** brought public defeat when Israel was defeated at Ai. The Lord revealed that the camp was defiled,

and Achan's confession exposed how covetousness 🖐️ **KUV-uh-tuss-ness** led to rebellion. His judgment reminded Israel that obedience to God was not optional and that **sin**, even when **secret**, affects the entire community.

So just as Achan 🖐️ **AY-kan(Day-Can)** tried to hide sin at the beginning of Israel's conquest and was judged... Same thing here.

- At key moments in God's plan, He sometimes deals with sin immediately.
- This was not normal church discipline...it was God's direct judgment.
- Peter did not cause their deaths. God Himself did.

And verse 11 says:

**Acts 5:11 NIV "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events."**

A healthy, respectful fear of God leads to a healthy church.

Today, many people approach Christianity too casually, as though it doesn't call for real commitment or sincere devotion. But **Hebrews 12:29** (NIV) reminds us, **“Our God is a consuming fire.”**

God's grace is amazing, but it does not mean we stop honoring Him with reverence and awe.

👉 Many want the security of church without the call to holiness. Yet true revival always begins the same way ... with **repentance** and a **heart** that takes **God seriously**.

#### **4. The Testimony - Verses 12-16**

After purification comes power.

**(Acts 5:12 NIV<sup>12</sup> The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade.)**

Verse 14:

**"Acts 5:14 NIV Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number."**

👉 When the church was purified, it began to grow even more.

Notice something interesting in verse 13:  
**"Acts 5:13 NIV<sup>13</sup> No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people."**

The church was respected ... but not casually entered.

- Today, we often lower standards to grow attendance.

But God grows what is holy.

In church history, during the early centuries under Roman persecution, believers were tested before baptism. Why? Because joining meant **suffering** and probably dying a horrible death.

When the church fears God more than people, it grows.

## **II. Opposition from Without (Acts 5:17-42)**

Now Satan switches tactics.

If corruption from within fails, try persecution from without.

### **1. Jealous Leaders - Verse 17**

**(Acts 5:17 NIV<sup>17</sup> Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.)**

The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, angels, or spirits. And here...the apostles are preaching resurrection and performing miracles.

Jealousy drove them.

Just as Cain killed Abel.

Just as Joseph's brothers envied him.

Just as religious leaders envied Jesus.

👉 Jealousy is spiritual poison.

## 2. Angelic Deliverance - Verses 19-20

Verse 19... **(Acts 5:19 NIV<sup>19</sup> But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.)**

They are told: Verse 20...

**Acts 5:20 NIV<sup>20</sup> "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life."**

Notice this:

They are not delivered to hide.  
They are delivered to preach.

God sometimes delivers.  
Sometimes He allows suffering.

In Acts 12, Peter is delivered ... but James is killed.

👉 God is in control, even when things do not happen the way we expect.

### **3. Refusal to Be Silent - Verse 29**

When confronted again, Peter says:

**(Acts 5:29 NIV<sup>29</sup> Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings!")**

This is the line every believer **must** decide.

When culture contradicts Christ .... who do you obey?

The early Christians were commanded to say “Caesar is Lord.”

👉 They refused.

Today, as believers... we all face pressure in workplaces, schools, governments.

But obedience to God is non-negotiable.

#### 4. The Gospel Proclaimed Again - Verses 30–31

***(Acts 5:30–31 NIV<sup>30</sup> The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.)***

Even after they had crucified Jesus, Peter is still offering them repentance.

In **Matthew 27:25** (NIV), the people had shouted, ***“His blood is on us and on our children!”***

Now Peter is showing them something powerful: the very blood they called down in guilt could actually cleanse them .... **if they would repent.**

Zechariah 12:10 points to a future day when Israel will look upon the One they pierced and recognize Him as Messiah.

***Zechariah 12:10 NIV<sup>10</sup> “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.***

Even here in Acts 5, God’s grace was still being offered.

## 5. Gamaliel's Counsel - Verses 34-39

Gamaliel 🖐️ guh-MAY-lee-uhl, a Pharisee and respected teacher, advises a neutral stance.

He says if this movement is from men, it will fail.

If from God, it cannot be stopped.

This sounds wise.

But refusal to take sides about Christ is impossible.

Jesus said in **Matthew 12:30 NIV:**

**<sup>30</sup> "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."**

Gamaliel 🖐️ guh-MAY-lee-uhl trained Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:3).

His student chose boldly and followed Christ.

Gamaliel 🖐️ **guh-MAY-lee-uhl** chose to wait and remain undecided.

But putting off a decision about Jesus can be spiritually dangerous.

## 6. Beaten but Rejoicing - Verses 40-42

After being flogged (Deuteronomy 25 allowed up to 40 lashes), they are released.

Verse 41: **Acts 5:41 NIV<sup>41</sup> The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.**

Rejoicing after being beaten.

This is supernatural joy.

**Philippians 1:29 says: <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him,**

Verse 42 says: **Acts 5:42 NIV<sup>42</sup> Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.**

Daily.

Publicly.

Privately.

That is the model.

## **Application for Today**

Acts 5 teaches us three powerful truths:

1. God purifies His church.
2. God protects His message.
3. God empowers bold obedience.

Satan still attacks with deception and intimidation.

But Jesus said in ***Matthew 16:18 NIV***  
***18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.***

The church survives Rome.  
It survives persecution.  
It survives hypocrisy.  
It survives criticism.

Because Christ is alive.

## **Invitation to Salvation**

Maybe you are listening today and you realize something.

You cannot fake faith.  
You cannot borrow someone else's

relationship with God.

You cannot stay neutral about Jesus.

Acts 5 shows us that God sees the heart.

But here is the good news:

The same Jesus who judges hypocrisy also forgives sinners.

**Romans 10:9 NIV says: <sup>9</sup> If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**

Not reformed.

Not improved.

Saved.

If you have never given your life to Jesus Christ, today is the day.

Turn from sin.

Trust in Christ.

Receive forgiveness.  
Be born again.

**Pray:**

**“Lord Jesus, I confess I am a sinner. I believe You died for me and rose again. Forgive me. Cleanse my heart. I surrender my life to You. Be my Lord and Savior. Fill me with Your Spirit. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”**

If you prayed that sincerely, the Bible says you are saved.

## **Closing Prayer:**

**Father God, thank You for Acts chapter 5. Purify Your church. Protect us from deception within. Strengthen us against persecution without. Give us boldness to obey You rather than men. Fill us with the joy of suffering for the Name of Jesus. May we never stop teaching and proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah. We love You, Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen.**