

Acts 5

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 30 July 2009 10:23

This chapter is about two things: lying to God and to God's people, and the power of God. It is set against a background of the fury of religious leaders, as Israel was tottering towards the end of its national life.

Many of us make a promise to God. How? By saying that what we do is 'Christian'. Very often Christians do what they want to do. What they do is selfish. They have no idea that they are angering Almighty God! A single man might go off to Africa to be a missionary, because he thinks this is what he ought to do. He wastes his time and may return home again after a short while, disillusioned with God!! But, he chose to do what he did, disregarding the Holy Spirit. Individual belief is a promise to God, to obey His commands. We are not free to do whatever we want, even if it seems 'good'.

Married people often live as though they were separate. God says that when we are married we are 'as one' and so should think and act as one. When we do not, divorce is a sure result! This is because when one partner acts selfishly, doing whatever she or he wants to do, disregarding the other person, it is a sign of sin. Marriage is a promise to God. Those who go off on their own are splitting the marriage apart and refusing to obey the laws of marriage set up by God.

Men become pastors or other 'religious' workers, thinking it is God's work. But, unless he has been specifically called by undisputed means, his role is false and he sins. To do a ministerial work is a promise to God. It is not just the people we hurt if we are not called, it is God that we disobey.

In every part of life, if we claim to belong to Christ we have an obligation to do what he commands. We do not have the option of choosing for ourselves. I decided in 1996 to go back into full time nursing. I missed the opportunity to work part-time at the ministry. Do not be deceived – God will not tolerate Christians doing what they wish, if what they wish is harmful to others or disobedient to God. There has to be a penalty paid.

At the start of this chapter, a couple pretended to do something for God and for themselves as a family. This led to God's swift punishment of death. They promised something to the apostles and to the communal purse, but their actions were less than good and Peter reminded them that their lie offended God, more than it offended him. So, for their selfishness, they died instantly.

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If you do something and claim it to be good and useful, beware. As a Christian if you actually do harm to others, and cause them grief, your sin is against God. This means you are actually lying to God. Pull back immediately no matter what it costs, even if you think you look foolish to others. The alternative is a penalty from God, and it might be far more than you wish to pay.

The second part of the chapter is to do with power. When we become Christians, God gives us power and authority. What we can do in this power is enormous and is limited only by the command of God Himself.

As we watch enemies ranging themselves across a thousand hills against us, we might fail and run away. But God is with us. If we stand firm, He will give us victory. Running away from reality is also a sin. Often, we choose a particular direction because we fear the future, or think we must do this or that before we grow older and miss an opportunity. But, what we choose may not be God's wish, and the end result can be disastrous.

Do not choose to hide or run away. Choose God's will and stand firm! Very often our worst enemy is our own heart. We do things we ought not to do. Others might think we do well, but God sees it as deliberate avoidance of His will. Then, if we continue, we will not prosper or do well, because God is not with us in our venture. Genuine power only comes when we do His will. When we do His will our lives 'take off' and we come to realize that what we would have chosen for ourselves was as dung, and just as useful!

The early Christians stepped out with boldness and their lives were amazing. These Christians turned the world upside down! Want to see God's power in your life? Then start by obeying every command of God. That is the key. Then God will lead us in *His* direction, not our own. This is the only valid path and success in God's eyes.

Verses 1 - 6

1.

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

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And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

3.

But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

4.

Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

5.

And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

6.

And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

From the beginning, Christians sold what they had and put the money into a common pot. A married couple, Ananias and Sapphira, decided to sell a possession; in verse 8 we find it to be a plot of land. (The Greek *ktēma*, 'possession', in this verse translates as land, property, or estates).

When they received payment for the land, they decided to give some of it to the apostles for distribution. But, they obviously pretended it was the full price, when, in fact, they retained some of it for themselves.

Peter, given discernment by the Holy Spirit, knew what they had done and challenged Ananias. His wife was not yet in the house. Peter demanded to know why Ananias lied to the Holy Ghost, for any lie told to a Christian is primarily a lie against God. Why did he keep back part of the

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selling price? The land belonged to him. When he sold it, he had the option to keep all the money. Instead, he kept back some and pretended that the portion offered to the apostles was the whole amount.

When Ananias heard this condemnation, he fell down dead, and everyone there was filled with great fear. This might sound harsh, but the situation was not as we have it today. Everyone was selling up and giving the whole amount to the apostles. It was for the sole benefit of God's people.

It was not a sin to keep back money, but it was a sin to give only some of the money whilst pretending it was the whole amount. Ananias died because, at this very early stage of Christian living, he had lied to the Holy Spirit. God had to teach Christians what it means to be holy, before lies got out of hand. Ananias was wound in burial cloth and taken out to be buried immediately.

What this shows us is that what we think is nothing today, was worthy of death at that time. Have you lied to God? Have you misconstrued something to fellow Believers? Have you been asked for help by God's people but denied it, saying you did not have the resources? The sin is still worthy of death.

How many Christians have died in every age because they lied to the Holy Spirit? This account is one of warning to all Believers, to tell us that every sin is worthy of death, and that God punishes those who are not truthful to Him and to His people.

Verses 7 - 11

1.

And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

2.

And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

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3.

Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

4.

Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

5.

And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

Three hours after Ananias died and was removed, his wife, Sapphira, came in. She did not know what had happened. Peter asked her if the price of the land was as Ananias had said. She lied and said they had received a certain amount and gave it all to Peter. He again condemned their actions in lying to God, and told Sapphira that the young men who had just returned from removing her husband's body would now carry her out in like manner. Immediately, she fell down dead and was removed by the young men. They buried her with her husband.

The whole Church, and all who heard of these double deaths, were fearful. This was Almighty God putting His stamp of authority on all who dared to commune with Him falsely. Today, if we are not truthful with the Lord, He is likely to do something similar. If not death, He will bring disaster upon our lives. Or worse, He will leave us to our own devices.

Do not think your sin will be hidden from God! You can hide your true motives from fellow believers, and even from your family, but not from God. He knows everything you have said and done, whether in secret or not, whether with words or in silence. He knows before you say or do or think, and even before you decide to do them!

God knows if what we do is done for Him. He knows if what we do is honourable. He knows if

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what we do is harmful to others, whether spiritually, morally, socially, politically, or personally. He knows if we hurt people around us, our family, or friends. And He does not let us get away with it. At some time, if not swiftly, He will act and punishment must follow, even on this earth.

Those who continue in this way, knowing God's watchfulness, are those who are either unsaved or those whose Christian lives are filled with selfishness. We might get away with hurting people around us, because people prefer not to let others know their shame or anger... but God knows!

Peter said that to lie to God in any way was to incur His anger. Do not think you can get away with it, when no-one else ever has. The lie of Ananias and Sapphira was based on selfishness. They wanted to do what they wanted to do, whether or not it hurt others (including God). So, God punished them on the spot. Do not let it happen to you!

Verses 12 - 16

1.

And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

2.

And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

3.

And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

4.

Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

5.

There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

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God performed many miracles through the apostles, establishing their authority. They did 'many' signs and wonders. Today, we see relatively fewer, because the source of the power is already known to mankind and to Christians. On the other hand, God still performs miracles for His own purposes.

Christians continued to meet in Solomon's Porch, enraging the rulers! Men and women who believed joined them and swelled the number of Christians, but onlookers dared not even stand near them for fear of both God and the rulers. Yet, even those who dared not join them glorified the apostles for the amazing things God was doing amongst them.

In essence the crowd could see the apostles and so they were the objects of praise, rather than God Himself. It was a bewildering time for them. Until Jesus, they knew almost no miracles or spiritual power. Jesus burst upon their lives with more miracles and power than they could cope with. And now here were the apostles performing miracle upon miracle, proving, by their association with Jesus, that the power they had was the same as that of Jesus.

News of these things spread like wildfire and huge crowds thronged Jerusalem, as sick people were taken into the streets for Peter to see and heal. As Peter walked, he passed beds and couches of the sick. Those who put them there, and the sick themselves, believed that even Peter's shadow, as he passed by, would heal them.

Very soon the sick and those possessed by demons from surrounding cities, were also brought to Jerusalem. And Peter healed them all, just as Jesus had done. It might seem that these activities only belonged to the apostles and the very early churches. But, that is to sell God short! The same power in Peter is in us today. The same authority is given to us. As with Peter, who only performed miracles already prompted by God, so we have spiritual power to do the same, if God prompts.

Today, God's visible miracles may seem diminished, but this is to misunderstand the situation. The miracles have not been diminished – they have simply been reduced in number. To be diminished implies degeneration. For His own reasons, God does fewer miracles today, but they still occur. Many Christians do not realize the scope of 'miracle' and think it only applies to

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spectacular healings.

But, miracle covers far more than that. In many cases, Christians fail to see the miraculous, because they believe miracles no longer occur. Or, for the same reason, they do not ask for God's interventions, so do not get any. They disobey God by not asking, because we are *told* to ask.

All Christians, no matter how feeble, have spiritual power. But, resting in their own frailty, they do not expect or use that power. False Christians believe they have immense power and claim to use it, but their power, if it exists, is from Satan. However, it is very clear that the text shows us a remarkable and unique time in history, when the apostles were given abundant and unlimited power to perform miracles. This will never again be repeated, because the time in history cannot be repeated.

Miracles occur because God wishes to perform them without known reason and without being petitioned. They also occur because men seek them legitimately, but only after being prompted to do so by God. They do not occur if the petition is not valid, e.g. not prompted by God. With Peter, he performed miracles because God prompted him to do so in every case, without limit, for the sake of authenticating His word.

Verses 17 - 20

1.

Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,

2.

And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

3.

But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

4.

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Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

This was all too much for the rulers of the Temple! They killed Jesus. They warned Peter and John. Now they were back again, with a very high profile and attracting massive crowd support from the entire area! The high priest and the Sadducees had the apostles arrested and put into prison. This time they were not put into the Temple prison, but into the 'common' prison, the local state prison for common criminals.

As the men lay in the prison at night, an angel came and opened the doors, allowing them to go free. The angel gave them an instruction from the Lord, to again go to the Temple and preach "the words of this life". That is, the fullness of life given by Jesus Christ to all who believe and are saved.

At times our enemies gather around and seem to have an overpowering hold over our lives. We shrink back in fear and quake. But, we are to boldly speak out and stand firm. God will give the strength!

Peter was warned time and again not to speak out or to use words the rulers did not like! He did so because he was commanded to his task by God. That other leaders did not like it is irrelevant. His words were definitely not accepted by religious groups at the time. And many kept a distance because they feared the rulers and enemies. Even so, Peter stood to be counted, because the Holy Spirit ruled, not opinion. Let it remind us not to suppress what we have to say and do because 'Christian' groups do not like our stance, words or supposed 'attitude'.

Some of these well-known groups have a carefully planned set of policies and ways of speaking. They believe that those who do not conform to their particular way of doing things are undeserving and 'wrong'! So, they let them get mauled by the enemy. Not so with God! He helps those who are His, even when they act erratically or out of Christian character. But fellow Christians tend to be respecters of persons. Therefore, knowing we may be shunned by these 'religious betters' who have all the answers, we should just continue speaking out, if that is the Lord's command to our soul.

Verses 21 - 24

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1.

And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel and sent to the prison to have them brought.

2.

But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,

3.

Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.

4.

Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

The apostles went to their lodging place and rested, and returned to the temple early next morning, where they continued to teach. The word for 'taught', *didaskō*, suggests the men gave existing recent Christians instruction in doctrine, rather than the Gospel. In this way they reinforced the Gospel so that hearers could go back to their homes with basic knowledge.

Meanwhile, the high priest gathered the Sanhedrin (Council, *synedrion*) together with the senate (*gerousia*) – elders from every city and country. This signifies that the whole Sanhedrin was assembled. They waited while guards went to the prison in the city to collect the apostles.

The guards returned to advise the Council that the apostles were not there. They told the rulers that when they got to the prison all doors were securely locked and warders were suitable positioned and alert. But, when the door to the apostles' cell was unlocked, they were not there.

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The rulers, the Captain of the guard and the elders were shocked. They knew that the news would spread, and the people would grow more interested. They discussed amongst themselves what would now happen, as these new upstart preachers enthused the people. They suspected the new Gospel would spread fast, and could not foresee how much damage it would do to their own positions and religion.

Verses 25 - 33

1.

Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

2.

Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

3.

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,

4.

Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

5.

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

6.

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

7.

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

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8.

And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

9.

When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

As the Sanhedrin wondered what to do, someone came into the chamber and told them the apostles from the prison were teaching in the Temple. The captain went with guards and 'invited' the apostles back to the chamber. They did not force them or put them in chains, because they feared being mobbed by the crowd, and stoned. The apostles did not mind – they were empowered by the Holy Spirit.

When they were in the chamber, the high priest asked them what they were doing, when he had expressly warned them not to speak again and to teach in the name of Jesus. He said they had persisted in teaching the new doctrine... did they intend making the Sanhedrin guilty of the blood of Jesus?

The apostles responded – 'We should obey God rather than men. You crucified Jesus and the God of Israel brought him back to life again. Jesus is at God's right hand, a Prince and saviour. He will forgive all of Israel who repent. We stand here as His witnesses, as is the Holy Ghost, Who is given to those who obey.' In this they confirmed that Jesus is God.

The Sanhedrin were furious, not so much because of what they said, but because they knew it was true, and their consciences were seared. As is often the case with guilty men, even though they know they are at fault, they wanted to kill those who spoke the truth. The reason why homosexuals hate us so much is not because they think we are wrong, but because they *know* we are right!

But, by highlighting their guilt and shame we cause them discomfort and their consciences drive

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them to darkness. That is why they hate Christians. The same goes for Muslim extremists and all who loathe Christians and their faith.

Verses 34 - 39

1.

Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

2.

And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

3.

For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

4.

After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

5.

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

6.

But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

As the Council discussed how they could kill the apostles, Gamaliel, a Pharisee well-known to the people as a legal expert, asked for the apostles to be removed from earshot for a while.

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Then, he advised the Sanhedrin to be very careful. He reminded them of a self-important upstart named Theudas who managed to get 400 followers. But, most of them were killed, and the rest escaped and were never heard of again! Theudas was just one of many self-made chiefs or insurgents who plagued the Romans in the last days of Israel. Then, said Gamaliel, along came the Judean, Judas, who encouraged an uprising during the time of tax registration. He, too, had followers, but they also perished or were driven away.

So, said Gamaliel, leave these men alone. If their work is of their own making, it will simply melt away to nothing. But, if their work is of God, you can never get rid of it. Do not run the risk of fighting against God!

Sadly, many Christians today use the same logic, thinking that human-based works will eventually disappear. Meanwhile, the damage they do can be severe and widespread. This is why, if a work is human-based, Christians must oppose them. Not to the point of fanaticism, but that truth may be shown. There is never an excuse for Christians to be silent in the face of evil.

Verses 40 - 42

1.

And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

2.

And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

3.

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

The Sanhedrin agreed and called the apostles to the chamber again, beat them, and commanded them, again, not to speak in the name of Jesus. Then, they let them go. The

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beating took the form of thrashing, or flaying the skin.

Note that the Sanhedrin did not object to miracles or even to preaching, so long as they did not do it in Jesus' name, which was in opposition to Judaism. This is a common thing in modern times. It is the name of Jesus that draws hatred and opposition!

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, thanking God that they were counted worthy of punishment for speaking in Jesus' name. Rather than hide away, they continued to preach in Jesus' name, not just in homes, but in the Temple, under the noses of the very rulers who ordered them to be silent. The warning merely served to drive them onward with more intent. And the power of the Holy Spirit gave them boldness.

This is the picture we should look for; this is how we should be today. When I attended a church I had not been in for thirty years I was dismayed and saddened by the picture I saw. It was dead. Life did not emit from the congregation, only a weary acknowledgement! The singing was slow and monotonous and the response to a bright 'hello' was shallow and without heart! That, friends, is why they do not know joy and power. Their very flatness is a result of lack of truth, and a lack of personal knowledge of our transcendent God.

There is no power, even though they have the Holy Spirit in them. It might sound irreverent, but I expect these people were so worldly wise that the Spirit was sleeping! After all, the people did not show an ounce of power. And this kind of response is found everywhere. Many think I am far too lively, so they avoid talking! I am lively because Jesus is alive and He expects me to show signs of breathing, not laying down in a coma! I am lively because I experience what I am talking about and do not treat it as mere 'Sunday fodder'.

God help us all to live and to show genuine Christian power.

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