

ACTS 4:23-37

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

““Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶ The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord
and against his anointed one.

²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

| When you think about Christian unity, what factors do you believe bring
| believers together?

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+ What is the reaction by believers as Peter and John explain their miraculous
| release from jail?

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| Read carefully the prayer in verses 24-30. What does this prayer reveal about
| their view of the persecution they were facing?

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| Reflect on the important statement from their prayer found in verse 28. How does
| this inform us about God and His plans?

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| The believers don't pray for their persecution to stop but instead for boldness
| (verse 29). What does their example teach us about how to pray in difficult times?

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| What kind of difficult situations lead you to pray? How do these experiences shape
| your faith?

DAILY READINGS

1. 2 CHRONICLES 20:1-30
2. MATTHEW 6:5-24
3. LUKE 11:1-13
4. EPHESIANS 3:1-21
5. COLOSSIANS 1:3-14
6. ACTS 4:23-31
7. ACTS 4:32-37





ACTS 5

ANANIAS & SAPPHIRA

In Acts 4:32, Luke records that “all the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.” In chapter 5, we encounter the deceitful actions of Ananias and Sapphira regarding their personal offering to the church. They deliberately withheld a portion of the proceeds from a sale of their land and brought the rest to the apostles.

Ananias and Sapphira missed the point of the incredible things God was doing in the first-century church. By misrepresenting themselves before God and His people, they underestimated the depth of God’s disdain for hypocrisy. Jesus warned His followers of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Luke 12:1) who pretended to be more righteous than they actually were. It seems that, like the Pharisees, Ananias and Sapphira made a good show, pretending they were giving their all as they placed their offering at the apostles’ feet. Though they were not required to give the entire profit from the sale of the property, they misrepresented it as such. What is more, they conspired with one another in doing so.

Peter asserted that in lying to the church, they were lying to the Holy Spirit, and in lying to the Holy Spirit, they were lying to God. The apostles likely still felt the sting of Judas' deception who, according to the Apostle John, "was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it" (John 12:6). Peter also attributed Ananias and Sapphira's duplicity to Satan's influence, but they willingly cooperated with full knowledge of deception. Their decision led to disastrous consequences. They justified. They lied. They died. The likelihood of their continued hypocritical influence was snuffed out before they could take another step or say another word.

As a result, great fear seized the whole church and anyone else who became aware of their misdeeds. Why? They were fully reminded that toying with God and His church was unwise. As followers of Christ, our faith is expressed through words and deeds and reflects Him. We should never take the privilege and responsibility of being part of His body lightly. Those who are associated with Jesus' Church are accountable for their actions. As Paul reminded the Corinthians, "You are not your own, you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20). We belong to Him.

This story should cause us to shudder and tremble. At times we all fall short and fail to authentically represent Christ and His church. We all have a limitless capacity for self-deception. However, an awareness of His presence and understanding that our actions have consequences will guide us into a healthy relationship with God and His church.

Perhaps this was not the first misstep of Ananias and Sapphira. Though the Scriptures do not reveal other instances of their willful disobedience or deception, their pretense could have been representative of a pattern of hypocrisy. As the saying goes, "You don't suddenly go wrong; you're suddenly found out." In any case, God ended the charade and got everyone's attention.



