

# Acts 5:1-11: Is God the Worst Perfectionist Ever or A Loving Father?

Ricardo Campos, Pastor Grace Chapel, Orange, CA October 2, 2016

## I. Introduction

When God says, “Be holy for I am holy,” is He revealing His colossal OCPD? Is He a father who will not stand for any imperfections in His children? Or is it possible that even these words are from a Loving Father who wants to see His children happy and flourishing? How does He respond when we do sin? If He does punish us severely, does it reveal love for us or implacability in Him?

## II. Acts 5:1-11: Are You Terrified of God, Especially When You Sin or Do You See a Loving Father?

**5:1-6**, at the end of chapter four, Barnabas showed true love for his Christian brethren by selling his land and giving all the proceeds to help those in need. We have another land sale but this one is in contrast to Barnabas'. A husband and wife, Ananias and Sapphira, sell a plot of land. However, Ananias kept part of the money for himself and his wife was aware of it. He then brought the money to the apostles and claimed that this was all the money from the sale. But Peter knew exactly what he had done and confronted him, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God”

This is the first recorded problem in the church. Satan has attacked the church from without (previously Israel's leadership arrested Peter and John and put them on trial), but now he tries to attack the church from within. Satan certainly influenced Ananias to commit this horrific sin, but Ananias invited Satan into his heart the moment he gave in to his greed and conceived this lie to keep part of the money. If you give Satan an opening, he will break the door down in order to “steal, kill, and destroy” (John 10:10), which is his goal with everyone on this planet.

Peter's statement in 5:4 reveals that Ananias' sin was completely unnecessary. He had absolute control over the land and the money he got from it. The fact that Barnabas sold his land and gave all the money to the apostles didn't mean that Ananias had to. He could've kept the land and not sold it at all. He could've sold it and kept all the money for himself. Or he could've sold it and given all or only part of the money. Each one of these was a legitimate option. But instead, he gave into his greed and lied, not to men but God, which proves two things about the Holy Spirit: He is God and He is a person—you can only lie to a person. In turn, God the Holy Spirit responds swiftly to this egregious lie; He kills Ananias on-the-spot and his body's taken out and buried. And great fear came upon all who heard about this. Why was God so severe?

**5:7-11**, three hours later, his wife, Sapphira, arrives unaware of what happened to her husband. Peter asks her if the amount Ananias claimed was the price they got for the land. She said, “Yes.” Why did Peter ask her this, is he trying to trap her or give her a chance to repent? He's giving her a chance to escape her husband's fate, but like her husband, she stuck with the lie. Peter confronts her and informs her of the magnitude of her sin: they have lied to the Spirit of the Lord. Therefore, Peter points to the feet of those who buried her husband and informs her that she will be buried too. At that moment the Holy Spirit took her life too and they buried her alongside her husband. And great fear came over not only Christians, but all who heard of what happened.

Why was God so severe with Ananias and Sapphira? There are other examples in Scripture of immediate and/or severe punishment by God including death: He burned alive Aaron's two eldest sons for bringing fire into His Tabernacle which He did not command (Leviticus 10:1-3). He struck king Uzziah with leprosy for attempting to burn incense on the altar and he died in that condition isolated from God and His people (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). He killed Uzzah instantly for touching the Ark of the Covenant, even though he was trying to keep it from falling (2 Samuel 6:1-7). He took the lives of many for observing communion in a sinful way (1 Corinthians 11:30). Why would God punish so severely. It has to do with His standard of holiness. Every time you're in God's House or in His presence or you represent Him directly, there's a standard you must uphold because "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). This is why He urges us to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16). Aaron's two sons and king Uzziah walked into God's House and did as they wanted instead of strictly following God's protocol regarding fire and incense. Even though Uzzah was trying to honor God by not allowing the Ark to fall, only Levites and only Levites from the family of Kohath were allowed to transport the Ark, but even they were not allowed to touch it lest they die (Numbers 4:1-15). And to observe communion in a sinful state is to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, an insult of the highest degree (1 Corinthians 11:27).

A tragic event in Moses' life illustrates just how serious God takes His holiness. The first thing we must understand is just how special Moses was to God. Moses was the only prophet with whom God ever spoke face to face and He hated when anyone disrespected Moses (Numbers 12:1-8). In fact, God told Israel that Messiah would be a Prophet like Moses, referring to how close Moses and God were (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). Yet in spite of how close Moses was to God and how much God loved him, when Moses failed to sanctify God before the people (Numbers 20:1-13), God took his life early (Deuteronomy 34:7) and prevented him from entering the Promise Land (Numbers 27:12-14), even though Moses begged over and over to enter it (Deuteronomy 3:23-26). However, even in this, God showed Moses mercy; He allowed Moses to see the entire Promise Land before his death (Deuteronomy 3:27). Why was God so severe with Moses? You cannot represent God as His Law-giver and disobey God in front of the entire nation (Numbers 20:1-13); this is a stain on God's holiness that He cannot abide.

This tells us why God was so severe with Ananias and Sapphira. What they did was worse than walking into the Holy of Holies—God's private chamber—and offering a pig on the mercy seat that sat atop the Ark of the Covenant! They were not only in God's House, they were God's House! That is, God no longer dwells in a Tabernacle or Temple made of stone. He dwells in His people collectively and individually (Matthew 18:20; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20). And they lied right to His face!

Does that mean God is unbending when it comes to sin? No, in fact as you can see even in some of these cases God showed mercy. Think of the woman caught in adultery or king David who murdered Uriah and committed adultery with his wife, both capital crimes. God let both of these live. Yes, He's a God of absolute holiness and demands as much, but He's also a God of patience and mercy. Not only does He give us a way to recover when we sin, the blood of His Son continues to cleanse us from all sin, **while** we're walking with Him (1 John 1:5-10). Therefore, when God says to us, "You shall be perfect, just as [I] your Father in heaven [am] perfect" (Matthew 5:48), He's not saying it to instill fear in us. God's commands are always there to encourage and invite us into a better life. After all, who do His commands benefit, Him or us?

### III. Conclusion

*But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."*