

Slain By The Spirit

[Acts 5:1-11](#)



Being slain in the Spirit is a term related to the [Charismatic movement](#) and [Pentecostalism](#) which describes a phenomenon in which the Spirit comes upon you and overcomes you with power, knocking you to the ground or slaying you. Today this has become the common denominator of the Spirit's presence with power and is sought after as proof of receiving the anointing. With such people as [Benny Hinn](#), [Rod Parsley](#), [Richard Roberts](#), [Todd Bentley](#) and a host of others who have developed it to be a trademark of their meetings.

We don't find Peter or John touching people and causing them to fall over. In fact as we have just seen with the lame man, when they touched him he didn't fall out he jumped up. Walking and leaping and praising God. They did not ask other disciples to stand behind those they were going to lay hands on, to catch them as they toppled backward by the power. The New Testament has no people



lining up waiting for the "anointing" to be passed on from another, not even the Apostles. Can you picture any of the Apostles running up to people and slapping them on the forehead, or [kneeing them in the stomach](#) (as Todd Bentley)? No soft music or repetitive choruses were sung to set an atmosphere for the anointing to fall. No one yelled repetitive phrases like, "Fire!" or "angles" or "shan-da-la, she bought a Honda"!

So does being slain in the Spirit have any biblical precedent? Yes, it does in Acts 5 we find two people who were slain by the Spirit but I don't think people will be lining up for this experience.

It was an exciting thing to be in the Jerusalem church in those days. There were the large gatherings in [Solomon's portico](#), where thousands heard the apostles preach about Jesus ([Acts 5:12](#); [2:47](#)). The church had an unusual sense of unity and caring ([4:32](#)). The apostles were performing extraordinary miracles to confirm the message of the gospel ([4:33](#); [5:16](#)). Every day there were stories of more people getting saved ([5:14](#)). Even by those on the outside held the church in high esteem ([5:13](#)).

But right in the middle of all this great stuff we come to eleven verses that deal with sin and its judgment. This strange passage is located between two status reports. Verses 32-37 describe the unity and selflessness of the church. People were selling their stuff and giving to help out those who had needs. The gift of Barnabas ([4:36-37](#)) is provided as an example of the gracious spirit which prevailed in the church as a whole. [Verses 12 through 16 of chapter 5](#) provide us with yet another status report, describing the condition of the church, the power of God manifested through the apostles, and the response of men to this. And in the middle of these two status reports is the account of the deaths of [Ananias and Sapphira](#), struck down in divine judgment for their sin of lying ([5:1-11](#)).

It is a remarkable thing that the Bible gives us not only the good and positive, but also the evil and negative things that have happened throughout biblical history. We can see David slay Goliath by the hand of the Lord and then see him fall into sin with Bathsheba. Peter received the divine revelation of Jesus being Messiah, then found himself denying the very Messiah he had proclaimed. We can learn from both the positive and negative.

Since Pentecost we have been seeing the grace of God poured out on His church and the gospel going forth and people be healed and saved. But now we see something quite different, we see the wrath of God.

But a certain man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,² and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 5:1-2 NASB)

This verse begins with “**But**” It’s unfortunate the chapter break is there, because the word “but” forces a contrast, which means you have to know what preceded and what’s being contrasted here. Ananias and Sapphira are the antithesis of Barnabas. They’re at the other end of the scale.

Here we meet two new people, Ananias, (which means the Lord is gracious) and Sapphira, (which means beautiful). What we see here is all there is to know about them. We have no farther account than what is recorded here.

After they saw the great generosity of Barnabas, and how well he was respected, Ananias and Sapphira decided they wanted some of the same respect. So they conceived a plan. They agreed to sell a piece of land which they owned. They decided that they would give a certain amount of the proceeds of that sale to the apostles, to meet the needs of the poor. They also determined to keep back a certain amount for themselves. Is there anything wrong with that? Not a thing. The problem is that they also agreed that they would lie about the amount which they gave to the apostles, so that their gift would be thought of as being the entire amount they were paid for their property. In other words, they wanted to appear to be giving all the money they received, but they were keeping part of it and pulling it all off by lying about it. It was, in short, a conspiracy of deception.

The words “**kept back**” in verse 2 are from the Greek word *nosphizomai*, which means “**to misappropriate or embezzle.**” As a matter of fact, this is the exact Greek word that’s used in the Septuagint (which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament) to describe Achan’s theft in Joshua chapter 7. Its only other New Testament use means to steal ([Titus 2:10](#)).

Ananias presented their gift to the apostles exactly as Barnabas had done (4:37).

When you notice the similarity of the language of verse 2 with verse 35 and verse 37 of chapter 4, it’s clear that this is meant to be a contrast. The language is almost exact:

and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:37 NASB)

But a certain man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property... and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 5:1-2 NASB)

They wanted everyone to think they were as committed as [Barnabas](#). They wanted the recognition, the honor, the influence that Barnabas had. This is a temptation I think we all wrestle with: the temptation to try to convince others we’re far more committed than we are—that we’re far more spiritual than we are.

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land? ⁴ "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God." (Acts 5:3-4 NASB)

How did Peter know what was going on? Did Peter have the early church equivalent of Jeremy and Brian checking out the real estate records to make sure they gave it all? No, I think that Peter as an Apostle had special gifts:

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. (2 Corinthians 12:12 NASB)

One of these gifts was “**the word of knowledge**”. This gift is mentioned by Paul in:

For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; (1 Corinthians 12:8 NASB)

The Word of Knowledge was a gift by which the Holy Spirit enabled a first-century believer to know and to instruct the assembly in truth now recorded in the New Testament. It is the ability to grasp the truth about a present situation seeing, knowing and understanding as the Holy Spirit sees, knows and understands.

Let's try to imagine for a moment the scene in the gathering of the church. The body had gathered for worship and the proclamation of the Word. At some particular time, Ananias came before Peter with a sack of money which he had set aside and presents to him as the full proceeds of the sale of his property. We have already seen that Barnabas had done this. Evidently Ananias had stated that he was going to give all of his proceeds to the church, so when he approached Peter it was under the guise of giving a magnanimous gift. The smile on his face was suddenly dismissed when Peter said:

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?" (Acts 5:3 NASB)

Now that must have been the shock of all shocks. That poor guy. He came up there waiting for the approval of the people. But instead Peter looked sternly at him and informed him that what he was doing was nothing but the act of Satan.

The ultimate source of this deception was Satan. That must have been news to Ananias, who thought this was entirely his idea (with the collaboration of Sapphira, of course).

"While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God." (Acts 5:4 NASB)

Peter affirmed the right of private property. The practice of the church was not communism, for each individual owned his possessions. Ananias (and all of the other saints, by inference) had complete freedom to use his property any way he chose. He could have kept it, or sold it, without sin. And even when he sold it, he was just as free in the use of the proceeds obtained from the sale. He could have kept it all or any part of it. His sin was not in the amount of money he gave or in the fact that he kept some of it back. His sin was that he lied, so that it would appear that he gave all of the money when he did not.

Notice in verse 3 that Peter tells Ananias that he has lied to the Holy Spirit:

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?" (Acts 5:3 NASB)

We must understand that the Holy Spirit is a Person. Only a person can be lied to or put to the test. Some have the mistaken notion that the Holy Spirit is merely a "force" or a "power" that works in people's lives. But Peter unmistakably shows that He is a Person. And as a Person, He is involved in relationships with other persons.

After stating that Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit Peter goes on in the next verse to say, ***"You have not lied to men, but to God."*** Thus demonstrating by the use of this parallelism that the Holy Spirit is "God." Just as the Father is God and Jesus Christ, is God, the Holy Spirit is Himself God of very God.

The [1689 London Baptist Confession](#) states: ***"Three divine Persons constitute the Godhead—the Father, the Son (or the Word), and the Holy Spirit. They are one in substance, in power, and in eternity. Each is fully God, and yet the Godhead is one and indivisible..."*** (p. 19).

If the Holy Spirit is not God, then to pray to Him, to depend upon Him, to trust in Him, to ask for His power would constitute the highest form of idolatry!

The fact of the Spirit's deity lay the groundwork for the truth that the church is a "habitation of the Spirit." Paul expressed it like this:

in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:22 NASB)

That word "dwelling" [katoikētērion] means "*a place of settling down*" or "*a habitation.*" Thus to lie to the church is to lie to the Holy Spirit.

So Peter, instead of saying, "Great job Ananias, thanks for the money we could sure use it to help the poor", he said, "Ananias why are you lying to God."

And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came upon all who heard of it. (Acts 5:5 NASB)

Instead of receiving praise for his financial gift Ananias drops dead on the spot. At this time we are going to take an offering. Will you men please pass the box. Just kidding!

Peter was probably more surprised than anyone when Ananias fell down dead! There is no evidence that Peter had any will of his own in this matter. Imagine how Peter must have felt. How would you feel if you confronted someone about their sin and they drop dead? Half of the congregation is probably thinking, Wow Peter you killed the poor man. (Me and the homeless man—I was condemned for stopping a guy that was a possible threat, but this guy was giving money and Peter kills him)

What exactly happened in medical terms, we do not know. The text just says, "***Ananias fell down and breathed his last.***" Doctor Luke doesn't tell us what medically happened because this wasn't a physical problem; it was the wrath of God. He died by a judicial act of God's judgment. As a matter of fact, the phrase "***breathed his last***" which comes from the Greek word *ekpsucho*, occurs only where God strikes someone in judgment (v. 10):

And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died [*ekpsucho*]. (Acts 12:23 NASB)

This Greek word [*ekpsucho*] is also used in the [LXX](#) in Judges 4:21. Before we look at that story let me say this; When you put the Bible into the context where God put it there's stuff in it that you can't even imagine. In the Eastern mind names are used as metaphors. In Judges we see the story of Sisera and Jael. Sisera is the commander of the pagan army which Deborah and Barak had just defeated. Sisera is running for his life and he comes to the tent of Jael:

Now Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. (Judges 4:17 NASB)

Jael or [ya-el in Hebrew] means, "***Yahweh is God.***" She takes Sisera into her tent and he falls asleep. Then what happens?

But Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died. (Judges 4:21 NASB)

She puts a tent peg through his head. Do you know what the name Sisera means? It means "snake." And the word

“died” here is the Greek word *ekpsucho*. Which I said is used of divine judgment but here who killed the snake? Jael, Yahweh is God, killed Sisera the snake. Here we see the serpents head crushed by Yahweh.

If Ananias and Sapphira had sold their land and had told the apostles, “We feel led to give half to the church,” it would not have been a problem. But they lied. How many times have we acted deceptively because we wanted others to think we were more spiritual than we really were? Aren’t you glad you’re still alive?

And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came upon all who heard of it. (Acts 5:5 NASB)

“***Great fear came upon all who hear of it***”—don’t you know that that’s true! Fear of whom? God for sure, but also His apostles. This shows that the inspired Apostles couldn’t be deceived. Thus the whole fabric of apostolic authority is strengthened.

And the young men arose and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. (Acts 5:6 NASB)

Does anybody have the King James Version? I love the way the KJV puts this:

And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. (Acts 5:6 KJV)

They wound him up but it was too late, he was already dead.

Notice who did the physical work here—“***the young men.***” They were young and strong and took care of the manual labor.

In the hot weather of the Middle East quick burial was advisable, but in Jerusalem, the holy city it was essential. No corpse should be left until the morning.

That is the whole biblical history of Ananias, the man who lied to God. He was quickly disposed of, and no one wept for him. He was just a blip in the ongoing forward movement of God’s people. What a contrast with the future of Barnabas, the shining star who would go on to greater and greater things.

Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. (Acts 5:7 NASB)

Anybody notice the miracle here? Three hours had passed and still his wife hadn’t heard the news about her husband. Now they didn’t have text messages or e-mail or cell phones but still did she not have any friends that would run and tell her of her husband’s death?

And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price." (Acts 5:8 NASB)

Peter graciously gave Sapphira an opportunity to tell the truth, but she didn’t. She stuck to the lying story. So Peter quickly pronounced sentence on her. Her guilt was quickly summarized. First, she and her husband conspired together. She was as guilty as he was in this matter. She was guilty for taking part (or at least consenting) in this deception.

Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they shall carry you out as well." ¹⁰ And she fell immediately at his feet, and breathed her last; and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. (Acts 5:9-10)

NASB)

“You have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test.”—The key First Testament texts which deal with putting God to the test are [Exodus 15:25](#); [16:4](#); [17:2](#) and [Deuteronomy 16:6](#). Significantly they all deal with times when there was a need to satisfy physical requirements, and all refer to the fact that they were not prepared to trust God. That was why Jesus refused to put God to the test ([Matthew 4:7](#); [Luke 4:12](#)). He did trust God. So underlying the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was unbelief and an unwillingness to trust God.

Ananias and Sapphira may well have said to themselves, “If we sell all that we have, we will have nothing to fall back on.” Keeping back a little of the money they obtained from the sale of their property would give them a little security. They were, in the process of providing for themselves, not trusting in God.

Again, what happened was not Peter’s doing, it was God’s, this was divine judgment, given as a warning to all.

Couldn’t we argue here that Sapphira was just submitting to her husband and thus not really guilty? Some argue that a wife should submit to her husband, even if he asks her to join him in doing wrong. This story shows the error of that view. We are always to obey God over men. The concept of submission does not extend to submitting unto sin.

Married couples in the Lord have a responsibility to keep each other from sin, and to refuse to participate in sin together, for God will hold each accountable.

And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things. (Acts 5:11
NASB)

Twice our text mentions that great fear came on all those who heard of what happened to Ananias and Sapphira ([Acts 5:6, 11](#)). This fear was excited, not only by the sudden and awful fate of the guilty pair, but also by the fearful nature of that spirit-searching knowledge imparted to the apostles.

“The whole church”—This is the first mention of “the church” in Luke and it simply signifies the whole body of believers within the covenant, the covenant community.

The word "church," can refer to more than one thing. Sometimes it refers to the body of Christ as it has existed throughout history, the universal church. Sometimes it refers to Christians living in various places during one particular time (e.g., the early church). Sometimes it refers to a group of Christians who live in one area at a particular time, a local church. Here it seems to refer to the local church in Jerusalem, which at that time was all the church.

Let’s see if we can answer some questions about this text. First of all a question that arises is, **“Were Ananias and Sapphira saved, were they believers?”**

Luke gives us no indication that these two weren’t believers; they were as much a part of the church as Barnabas was. Does that mean that God actually kills Christians? Yes, sometimes He does. There are times when a believer’s sin will cause God to kill them. Paul in writing to the Corinthians warned them of taking the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner:

Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. ²⁸ *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.* ²⁹ *For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.* ³⁰ *For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.* (1 Corinthians 11:27-30 NASB)

God had actually taken the lives of some of the Corinthians because of the way they come to the Lord's Table. John

also talks about sin leading to death:

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. (1 John 5:16 NASB)

You might ask, “What is the sin unto death?” I don’t know, so you better guard against all sin. James also talks about this:

This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; (James 1:19 NASB)

Is he speaking to Christians or non-Christians? Christians, he says, “my beloved brethren.”

Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21 NASB)

Do Christians need to do something to have their souls saved? No, the Greek word translated here as “souls” is [*psuche*](#) and is better translated “lives.” James is saying, “Put the sin out of your life or you may die.”

So God does at times kill sinning Christians. Someone may be thinking, “Thank God this doesn't happen any more.” It doesn't? How do you know? The Bible is complete so we don't have a divine commentary on things that happen today. I think this stuff still happens, we just often see it as sickness or an accident instead of God judgment.

What is the lesson here for us? God hates sin! Especially sin in lives of Christians. We also see that God not only hates it, He punishes sin. Paul put it this way:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. (Galatians 6:7 NASB)

Don't be deceived believer, God always has and always will deal with sin.

What was their sin? What did Ananias and Sapphira do to bring death? Some say it was because they didn't give all of their money to the church. I sure many pastors love that view and even use it at there pledge drives.

We know that the sin was **lying** because the text tell us so—*“You have not lied to men, but to God.”* They had vowed publicly in front of the congregation that they were going to sell this thing and give it all to the Lord. They lied to God and to men.

Since God pronounced and performed the death penalty on lying, it must be a serious offense which means that God's views things much differently than we do. The attitude of most people toward lying, including believers, is found in Jim Carrey's movie entitled [*Liar, Liar*](#). Near the end of the movie, there was a serious note when the father confessed to his son: “Max, I can't do my job, and tell the truth. **Everybody lies.**” Sadly, I would have to say that is not far off, I would have to say that “most everybody lies” there are some people who have integrity and are truthful.

Lying is part of society, and all too often we get caught up in the practice too. Though our society gives ample place to the lie, the Lord does not. The Bible teaches us that telling the truth is a necessity for survival of life as we know it. Chaos always results when lies replace truth. Can you imagine living in an environment where there is no TRUTH?— no truth on labels, contracts, guarantees, promises, commitments? Relationships would dissolve, because there would be no **trust** holding people together.

How vital for us as followers of Jesus to spend a few moments thinking about why it's important for us to always be

truth tellers.

Why is lying such a serious offense to God? Why was this deception, which seems to have hurt no one, so drastically disciplined by God? I think the answer is quite evident: the church is founded upon truth, and it grows by means of truth.

but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15 NASB)

Almost 80 times in the gospels the Lord is quoted as saying, “I tell you the truth.” If there was anything which characterized Him it was “*truth.*” Thus, He is “*the way, the truth, and the life*” ([John 14:6](#)). He is also said to be “*full of grace and truth*” ([John 1:14](#)). The Holy Spirit is called the “*Spirit of truth*” ([John 15:26](#); [16:13](#); [1 John 4:6](#)). Satan, on the other hand, is a “*liar*” and the “*father of lies*” ([John 8:44](#)), as well as a “*deceiver*” ([2 Corinthians 11:3](#); [Revelation 12:9-10](#)). The first temptation of Adam and Eve by Satan involved Satan’s denial of the truth which God had revealed to them. The saints are built up in their faith as each one “*speaks the truth in love*” ([Ephesians 4:16](#)), and “*lays aside falsehood*” ([Eph 4:25](#)). Is it any wonder then that truth is so important and that lying is considered such a serious offense? The God of truth hates lying:

There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: ¹⁷ Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, ¹⁹ A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers. (Proverbs 6:16-19 NASB)

Did you notice that out of these seven abominations, two of them deal with lying? God hates lying!

We seem to have too light of an attitude about sin in our day. Sin is odious in the sight of God! He hates sin! Sin is the very opposite of His holy character and acts. Sin is a description of everything which God loathes and declares that He will punish. Since sin is so contrary to God and His character it should come as no surprise that when those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ give way to sin it affects that body that has been set apart to holy living. Thus to protect His body the Lord judges sin.

This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on September 7, 2008. Media #430.



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