

## [Acts 5:1-11](#)

(1) Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. (2) With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. (3) 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? (4) 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 to men but to God." (5) When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. (6) Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. (7) About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. (8) Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." (9) Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." (10) At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. (11) Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

*New International Version*

The narrative of Ananias and Sapphira provides a dramatic illustration of the fact that [God](#) will not accept duplicity in His church. *Partial commitment to the truth is not enough.* In the case of this ancient couple, He judged "the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" without delay, stopping the lie literally dead in its tracks.

Although unstated in the account, Ananias and Sapphira likely coveted the status and reputation they would receive if God's people came to believe they were “big” contributors. With Satan's prodding (verse 3), they (Sapphira is fully complicit; verse 2) hatched the deceitful plan to sell some property and donate part of the proceeds for the use of the brethren. In reality, they conspire to mislead the church leadership (and ultimately, the brethren at large) into thinking that their generous gift comprised the entire sale price of the land, when in fact they had surreptitiously “kept back” a portion of the proceeds for their personal use. Their level of sacrifice for the needs of the church was not what they led others to believe.

Had God not intervened to abort their plan, they would have lived lives of hypocrisy for who knows how long, daily “practicing” the lie ([Revelation 22:15](#)) that they had “given all” to God. Without question, they would have lived the same sort of burdensome lives endured by Joseph's brothers for decades after their clandestine treachery toward their younger brother (see [Genesis 37:23-36](#)), as they feared serendipity every moment—a slip of the tongue, the development of an unwelcome and unforeseen circumstance, the vengeance of God, anything which might suddenly reveal the truth to their father, exposing them as the rogues they really were. Theirs was a skulking lifestyle—the way of life of any hypocrite, analogous to perpetually wearing a mask or a disguise to hide the real self, pretending to be one person, all the while being another.

But that is only half of the nasty story. Sir Walter Scott well wrote, “Oh, what a tangled web we weave, / When first we practice to deceive.” The hypocrite, enjoying the benefits of his duplicity (such as wealth, status, etc.) becomes desperately committed to maintaining the façade at any cost, doing all that becomes necessary to keep the charade going, lest he suffer financial, social, or emotional losses that his carnality could not accept. The cause of perpetuating the lie comes to enmesh his spirit. The myth becomes master.

Luke does not specify the amount of money Ananias and Sapphira held back. Was it 5% of the sales price or 20% or 50%? We do not know, and it does not matter! A lie is a lie. There are no “little white lies.” A life of duplicity can develop around any lie, big or little. It will always bear the same fruit, however.

— Charles Whitaker

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