

The First Sin and Trouble in the Church: Keeping Back



Acts 5:1-11

TEXT, EXPOSITION AND PRACTICAL HELPS

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THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF THE CHURCH, [Acts 2:1-7:60](#)

The First Sin and Trouble in the Church: Keeping Back, [Acts 5:1-11](#)

([Acts 5:1-11](#)) **Introduction:** the first sin ever to appear in the church was serious, very serious. It was the sin of *keeping back*. The sin and the judgment upon it serve as a warning to every believer.

1. *Keeping back is sin (v.1).*
2. *Keeping back is severely judged (v.2-6).*
3. *Keeping back influences others to sin (v.7-10).*
4. *Keeping back—its judgment causes great fear (v.11).*

1. ([Acts 5:1-4](#)) Stewardship— Sin— Hypocrisy— Deception: keeping back is sin.

Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, were professing believers, members of the early church.

They professed Christ, professed.....

- a. to deny self, all they were and had.
- b. to take up the cross daily.
- c. to follow Christ.

They had some property which they did not personally need for their own necessities. They were professing to follow Christ, to take Him at His Word. Therefore, they sold their property in order to help those who were desperately needing food, shelter, clothing, and the gospel. But their profession was just that, *profession only*, a false profession. It was hypocritical, deceptive, a lie. They tried to *fake* their commitment. They tried to deceive the church.

Their sin, holding back, was fivefold.

1. Keeping back is partial commitment. Ananias and Sapphira refused to give everything beyond their own necessities. They kept back *part* of the money that so many desperately needed, kept back that which was the difference between life and death for so many. They hoarded, chose to hang on to *part* of the world.

"And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" ([Luke 12:15](#)).

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" ([Col. 3:5](#)).

"For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" ([1 Tim. 6:10](#)).

"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty" ([Proverbs 11:24](#)).

"Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard" ([Proverbs 21:13](#)).

"He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse" ([Proverbs 28:27](#)).

"There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt" ([Eccles. 5:13](#)).

"For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely" ([Jeremiah 6:13](#)).

"And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness" ([Ezekiel 33:31](#)).

"And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage" ([Micah 2:2](#)).

2. Keeping back is deception: it is deceiving the church. Ananias and Sapphira wanted the church to think they were *fellow believers*. They wanted the privilege and the honor, the acceptance and the fellowship of believers without paying the price of commitment and loyalty to Christ and His church. They did not want to be left out. They wanted to be included and to become part of the church fellowship. But they did not want it enough to totally commit themselves to Christ and His mission. So they tried to deceive the church. **They became *pretenders* (hypocrites, liars).**

"For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" ([Romans 16:18](#)).

"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" ([Phil. 3:18-19](#)).

"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" ([2 Tim. 3:13](#)).

"Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another" ([Leviticus 19:11](#)).

"The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death" ([Proverbs 21:6](#)).

"And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity" ([Jeremiah 9:5](#)).

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" ([Jeremiah 17:9](#)).

"For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth" ([Micah 6:12](#)).

3. Keeping back is allowing Satan to fill the heart instead of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Person who stirs sin; He is not the Person who arouses a person to hoard and keep back. The Holy Spirit stirs love—love that cares and ministers ([Romans 5:5](#); [Galatians 5:22-23](#)). The Holy Spirit is not a murderer, not the one who tempts men to keep back that which would keep others alive (whether food or safety from freezing weather, or whether life in Christ).

Keeping back is of Satan; it is allowing one's heart to be filled with Satan's lies.....

- a. the lies that the challenge to give all one is and has is too much to ask ([Luke 9:23](#)).
- b. the lies that to lose oneself completely in the cause of Christ, to give up the world, is too unreasonable.
- c. the lies that what is important is to secure more and more in order to be acceptable, to have position and promotion, esteem and the comforts of the world.
- d. the lies that one is justified in keeping back some because no one knows the future and, after all, everyone else does it.
- e. the lies that one can give some and keep back some and still be acceptable to God.

The thing to remember is that Satan is the **"father of lies and a murderer"** ([John 8:44](#)). His strategy is to get us to believe his lie that we can ***keep back and hoard***. His purpose is to keep the desperate needs of the world from being met so that many persons will die prematurely, die without ever experiencing life, real life. Christ counters the lies of the devil with words spoken as simply as language can express, counters with all clarity and without equivocation or apology:

"No man cometh unto the Father, but by me" ([John 14:6](#)).

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" ([Luke 9:23](#)).

"Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me" ([Luke 18:22](#)).

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee: Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" ([Matthew 25:41-46](#)).

"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day....and it came to pass that...the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments....Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things: but now...thou art tormented" ([Luke 16:19, 22-23, 25](#)).

4. Keeping back is lying to the Holy Spirit. There are several ways this is true.

- a. A person says that he is surrendering his life or goods to Christ, but he does not give all.
- b. A person says that he wants the Spirit's presence and power when he is really unwilling to surrender all.
- c. A person says that he is committed to walk as a brother with other believers (who are indwelt by the Spirit) when he is not willing to pay the full price of discipleship.
- d. A person says that he wants the fullness of God's Spirit when the acceptance and approval of men is more important.

"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?" ([Acts 5:3](#)).

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" ([Acts 7:51](#)).

"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" ([Ephes. 4:30](#)).

"Quench not the Spirit" ([1 Thes. 5:19](#)).

"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" ([Hebrews 10:29](#)).

5. Keeping back is acting against and lying to God Himself. This, of course, is very serious.

- a. Keeping back mocks God.** A person mocks God's Word when he says that he is giving his life to God (which means all he is and has), but he does not do it. The person who keeps back is saying that he does not have to be honest with God, that he can lie to God. Pretending always mocks God and His Word. Pretending damages the name of God and causes the world to mock and scoff God, to deny Him and His power. The pretender actually does more harm and damage to the name of Christ than the greatest sinner. How?

A pretender shows and proclaims something—his life cries out to the world: "

The power of God's Son is.....

1. not attractive enough to draw me."
2. not challenging enough to captivate me."
3. not important enough for me to give up everything."
4. not powerful enough to change me."
5. not loving enough to demand my loyalty."
6. not beneficial enough to pull me out of the world."

- b. Keeping back cuts the heart of God.** God loves the pretender (**hypocrite, deceiver, liar**). As long as the pretender's heart has enough *softness* to respond to the gospel, God reaches out to him. He wants the pretender, the man who keeps back, to be saved. As long as he is lost, God's heart aches, longs, hurts for the man to come home.

God's heart is also cut to the core by the suffering and death of so many who could be helped by that which the man keeps back. God feels the infirmities and weaknesses of the whole human race ([Hebrews 2:17-18](#); [Hebrews 4:15-16](#)). God feels so much that He gave His *only* Son to make a way for the suffering of man to be handled and erased. The very reason so many are still suffering and are so desperate in the world is that so many of us are still keeping back instead of giving all we are and have to the mission of Christ.

- c. Keeping back is distrusting God.**

1. Keeping back is not letting go of what one has beyond his necessities.
2. Keeping back is feeling that one has to keep back *just in case*.
3. Keeping back is being apprehensive that what one has might not be enough when it is needed.
4. Keeping back is believing that securing *mammon* (comfort, ease, pleasure, plenty, money, houses, lands, investments) is what life is all about.

5. Keeping back is trusting in *mammon* and the world for one's security.
6. Keeping back is thinking one can serve God (give some to Him) and mammon (keep and hoard some).

God is simply not trusted, not completely and wholly, not in the sense that He craves. His Word is not believed or taken at face value.

The person who keeps back rejects the clear teaching of God's Word.....

- a. that a man must *deny himself* completely.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" ([Luke 9:23](#)).

- b. that God will give all "**these things**"—all the necessities of life—to the man who seeks Him first.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" ([Matthew 6:33](#)).

"Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee" ([Mark 10:28](#)).

"And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me" ([Luke 5:27](#)).

"Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth" ([Luke 12:33](#)).

"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" ([Luke 14:33](#)).

"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares" ([Luke 21:34](#)).

"And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake. Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" ([Luke 18:29-30](#)).

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" ([Romans 15:1](#)).

2. ([Acts 5:5-6](#)) Judgment— Sin, Results: keeping back is severely judged.

Note exactly what happened to Ananias. Peter said nothing, absolutely nothing about death. He did not even say anything about judgment. He merely pointed out the sin of Ananias. The judgment is of God and God alone. But look ahead to Sapphira ([Acts 5:9](#)). Peter did declare judgment to her. He and the whole church *now* knew the seriousness of *the sin of holding back*.

The judgment of Ananias and Sapphira teaches us several crucial lessons.

1. The sin of holding back is serious, very serious to God. When a person comes to Jesus Christ, God expects the person to be sincere and genuine through and through. He expects the person to deny himself—to give all he is and has to meet the desperate needs of dying people. This is the only reason Jesus Christ came to earth. There is no acceptance of anyone who does any less—only judgment.

2. The sin of keeping back involves many other sins, terrible sins. At the very least it involves the five sins described in this passage.

3. The heart of a person is not truly known except by God. When some read this passage, they wonder why Ananias was not given a chance to repent. They think the judgment was perhaps harsh. They have difficulty thinking of God as Someone who judges people to death.

But note something—note exactly what is said.

- a. "Satan filled thine heart."
- b. "[A] lie to the Holy Spirit."
- c. "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."

No one could know these sins had *filled* Ananias' heart, not by what he did, not without God. God revealed to Peter that the sins had *filled* and completely possessed Ananias. It *appeared* that Ananias was lying "**unto men**," simply trying to deceive the church. But it is said that his heart was *filled*, completely occupied and possessed, by Satan. No one could have looked at the sins of Ananias and known their depth—that all three sins were so deeply rooted—not apart from God revealing the fact.

The point is this: only God knows the heart of a person, what is in the depth of a person's heart and what fills a person's heart. Only God knows when a heart is fully possessed by evil. This is the reason God alone can judge, the reason judgment has to be left up to God.

**"Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first"
([Matthew 19:30](#)).**

4. The sin of Ananias seems to have been close to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (that is, saying the work of the Holy Spirit is of the devil).

The sin of Ananias, of keeping back was saying.....

- a. the work of the Holy Spirit allows sin.
- b. the work of the Holy Spirit in a life still allows a person to keep back something for himself.
- c. the movement of the Holy Spirit in a life still allows the devil to fill a heart with some sin.
- d. a person can be both righteous and worldly, living for God and for mammon.
- e. the Holy Spirit is not more important in a life than the devil and mammon.

5. If Ananias and Sapphira were genuine believers, if they had really trusted the Lord as their Savior, then their sin *may be* the "**sin unto death**" taught by Scripture.

Now note a most serious fact, a fact so serious it determines one's eternal destiny.

- a. Judgment upon sin does not always come as soon or as quickly as it did upon Ananias and Sapphira.
- b. But all sin will be judged. There is no escape from the penalty of sin, not if a person continues in sin.

"The wages of sin is death" ([Romans 6:23](#)).

"But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" ([1 Tim. 5:6](#)).

"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition" ([1 Tim. 6:9](#)).

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die" ([Ezekiel 18:4, 20](#)).

"He that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death" ([Proverbs 11:19](#)).

"Evil shall slay the wicked" ([Psalm 34:21](#)).

"But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death" ([Proverbs 8:36](#)).

"The perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them" ([Proverbs 11:3](#)).

"Disobedience received a just recompense of reward" ([Hebrews 2:2](#)).

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation" ([Hebrews 2:3](#)).

"Them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness...shall utterly perish in their own corruption" ([2 Peter 2:10, 12](#)).

The point is simply this: keeping back is condemned by God, and it is to be judged. Sooner or later it is to be severely judged. The only answer to sin is confession and repentance. The sin and judgment of Ananias and Sapphira shows this. God hates sin. Men must repent of sin. There is no other way to be acceptable to God.

"Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" ([Matthew 3:2](#)).

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" ([Acts 2:38](#)).

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" ([Acts 3:19](#)).

"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" ([Acts 8:22](#)).

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" ([Acts 17:30](#)).

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" ([2 Chron. 7:14](#)).

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" ([Isaiah 55:7](#)).

"But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die" ([Ezekiel 18:21](#)).

3. ([Acts 5:7-10](#)) Stumbling Block— Sin, Misleading Others: keeping back influences others to sin.

Note the three subpoints in the outline. Ananias, as head of the household, was responsible for his wife. He led his wife to follow right along with Him; he caused her to lie. He had the opportunity to lead his wife in righteousness, that is, in helping to meet the needs of so many who were so desperately in need. He had the opportunity to lead his wife to a complete and fulfilled life in Christ, a life perfectly assured of eternity. Instead he led her to sin and death. Scripture is strong in what it has to say about being a stumbling block and leading others into sin and death.

"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" ([Matthew 18:6](#)).

"But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" ([Matthew 23:13](#)).

"Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" ([Romans 14:13](#)).

"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" ([1 Cor. 5:6](#)).

"But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend" ([1 Cor. 8:12-13](#)).

4. ([Acts 5:11](#)) Fear, Godly— Self-denial: keeping back—its judgment caused great fear both in the church and in the world among those who heard about it.

Everyone recognized the great cost and seriousness of following Christ.

Following the Lord meant.....

1. denying self completely, surrendering to Christ all one is and has.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" ([Luke 9:23](#)).

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" ([Eccles. 12:13](#)).

"Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" ([Isaiah 8:13](#)).

2. walking the straight and narrow path, living righteously and godly in this present world and looking for the glorious return of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" ([Matthew 10:28](#)).

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" ([Romans 8:13](#)).

"And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" ([Galatians 5:24](#)).

"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" ([Titus 2:12-13](#)).

"And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" ([1 Peter 1:17](#)).