

ACTS
Power Lost and Power Gained
Acts 5:7-16

Do you take God's Word seriously? God says, "Be ye holy because I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15), and this means that each Christian is to have a life separated unto God and away from sin. The true believer is to be Christlike which involves commitment to a life of ethical purity and moral holiness. Yet, there are Christians who believe they can play "footsies" with God and test Him to the limit without God taking action against that sin. They seem to get as close to the world and sin as possible without getting burned. God tolerates this sort of action and attitude for awhile because He is longsuffering but He does discipline a believer for his sins and reserves the right to take the physical life of a Christian if he continues to rebel at the clear teaching of the Bible concerning holiness of life. This final and last stage of divine discipline is called "the sin unto 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. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death" (I Jn. 5:16,17).

This is the most serious and extreme form of discipline God gives to a rebellious and disobedient saint. This was the exact case with Ananias who was a saved man but who rebelled against God and God killed him because he lost his testimony on earth and hindered the working of God in the church of Jerusalem. The church was being greatly blessed with unity of purpose, for they were of "one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32), with unity in witnessing for "with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:33), and with unity in provision, "for there was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34). These early Christians were experiencing the fullness of God's power in their midst, but the sin of Ananias and Sapphira interrupted and hindered that power so that there was not the full working of the Holy Spirit. What was the sin of Ananias? He sold a piece of property and promised to give God all of it but then reneged on his commitment and decided to hold a portion back for himself. He gave the impression that he gave all when he had given only part of the money from the sale of the land. Ananias was guilty of lying to the Holy Spirit and hypocrisy because he was pretending to be something and do something which he was not and did not do. He was a liar, a hypocrite, a pretender and God hates a phony whose heart does not beat for the living God. God was so displeased with the sins of Ananias that He struck him dead. God took Ananias' life but saved his soul for his rebellion to God. His death was sudden, severe and supernatural. His life was cut short because his testimony for Christ had been destroyed because of his sin.

POWER LOST BECAUSE OF SIN Acts 5:7-12

Testing the Holy Spirit (5:7-9a)

(1) "Now there lapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened."
-- Ananias' wife Sapphira had a full knowledge of his deceit and hypocrisy and she gave full blessing to it.

"But a certain man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 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).

She was a co-conspirator in the whole plot. When she came home, after about three hours, she had no idea that God had struck Ananias dead.

(2) "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.’” -- Sapphira was given an opportunity to tell the truth but she too lied and repeated her husband’s sin of deceit and hypocrisy. If she would have told the truth her discipline would not have been so severe.

At this point, Sapphira could have warded off the judgment of God by confession to Peter and ultimately to God that she lied but she refused to do so and therefore she had to pay the consequences for her sin.

(3) “Then Peter said to her, ‘Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test.’” -- Both Ananias and Sapphira had deliberately conceived a plan to see how far they could go in presuming upon the longsuffering of the Holy Spirit. They had tested the Spirit and had gone too far.

A Christian who flirts with sin can only push the longsuffering of God so far and then God will lower the boom. No Christian ever sins and gets away with that sin!

Terminating the Physical Life of a Christian (5:9a,10)

(1) “Behold the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they shall carry you out as well.” -- Peter was surprised when God struck Ananias dead but was not surprised at all when He killed Sapphira. Peter had three hours to think about the sin unto death and God’s hatred of lying, deceit and hypocrisy. Peter told Sapphira she would die.

(2) “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.” -- Sapphira was the second Christian in the church to make shipwreck of her life. Her life on earth for Christ was useless and God took her home without any reward. How sad; saved but useless! Regenerated but unrewarded!

Sin unto death is physical death for a rebellious Christian. What is the element which turns ordinary sin into the sin unto death? It is the element of wanton, presumptuous action in the face of clear knowledge that something is wrong. It is persistence in a determined course of action when you know God has forbidden it. There are a number of examples in the Bible of sin unto death:

(a) Contacting the Dead -- “So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the LORD, because of the word of the LORD which he did not keep; and also because he asked counsel of a medium, making inquiry of it, and did not inquire of the LORD. Therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom to David the son of Jesse” (I Chron. 10:13,14). King Saul disobeyed God in many ways but God put the death curse on Saul because he was guilty of necromancy which is an attempt to contact the spirits of the dead. This practice is forbidden by God. Any involvement with witchcraft, séances, contacting the spirits for true believers in Christ is off limits, and when it is dabbled in, this could invite the most extreme discipline of physical death for the Christian.

(b) Partaking of the Lord’s Table in an Unworthy Manner -- “For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly, For this reason many among you are weak and sick and a number sleep” (1 Cor. 11:29,30). Some of these Corinthian Christians were partaking of the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner; that is, with known, unconfessed sin and they were inviting divine judgment or discipline on themselves. The result of partaking of the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner was that some were weak physically, some were suffering diseases and others were “sleeping” which means they were dead. The Lord’s Table is a very serious matter to God and it must also be to us who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ.

(c) Unbelief -- “Your corpses shall fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward who have grumbled against Me” (Numbers 14:29). According to the Books of Deuteronomy and Numbers, a whole generation of Israelites perished in the wilderness and no doubt many of those who perished were believers but rebellious. They refused to believe God and God killed them.

(d) Disobedience by Leadership “Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them’” (Numbers 20:11,12). God commanded Moses to speak to the rock so that water would flow from the rock for the children of Israel. The children of Israel were in constant unbelief and continually griping and complaining, so Moses became irritated with them and lost his cool. In anger, he struck the rock with a rod twice. God in grace gave the water to Israel but He severely disciplined Moses for his disobedience, for God's judgment is always harder on those He calls to leadership. Moses was forbidden to take the children of Israel into the Promised Land and was left to die on Mount Nebo. It is a serious matter for a person in spiritual leadership to disobey God.

(e) Rebellion -- “Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ ‘Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your companion, and he shall lie with your wives in broad daylight. Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.’ Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD.’ And Nathan said to David, ‘The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die’” (II Sam. 12:9-14).

King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, put to death to cover up Bathsheba's pregnancy. For these sins King David by Jewish Law should have been put to death, but David confessed the sins and warded off this final form of discipline. However, David paid heavily for his rebellion. Instead of taking David's life, God took the life of the child of adultery. The child was innocent and David was guilty. Why did God take this child? Because David would have rather lost his own life than to see his very own son put to death for his sin. Many people today would rather give up their own lives rather than have anything happen to their children whom they dearly love. God, knowing this, may reserve the right to touch our loved ones with tragedy in order to teach us the importance of living a godly life.

Terrible Fear (5: 11)

“And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things.” -- The reality of the sin unto death sobered the early church and they feared God. Every Christian should have a healthy fear of God's discipline because God hates sin, hypocrisy, pretense and phonies. Would be to God that it would be said of each individual Christian, “There is a God-fearing man. She is a God-fearing woman.” Fear is not our only reason for serving God but it is a good reason, and fear keeps us on the straight and narrow path. Love motivates us to go down that path.

POWER GAINED BECAUSE OF OBEDIENCE Acts 5:13-16

Signs and Wonders (5:12)

“And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solamon's portico.” -- The sin of Ananias and Sapphira had threatened the power of the early church. God dealt with these wayward saints and then the power was restored. Sin always breaks God's power in the life of a Christian. Whenever a Christian is rebellious or indifferent, he must confess that sin immediately so as to have the power of the Holy Spirit flowing through him. With the power restored, the Apostles were doing great signs and wonders. Notice it is the Apostles who were doing the miraculous works because they had the sign-gifts.

“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.” These sign-gifts passed off the scene of history when the last Apostle died. There are many modern

day Christians who are troubled by this account and honestly ask, “Why don't we see signs and wonders today?” They feel the church is not living in power unless these physical miracles are present. Many people, feeling that such signs and wonders are a mark of God's power, have tried to reproduce them and the result has been certain of the healing movements of our day with faith healers who travel about declaring that they are able to heal as did the Apostles. It is my personal understanding that these signs and wonders were done only by the Apostles who had the sign-gifts to introduce the new dispensation of the church and they passed off the scene after the first century. Today God still heals sovereignly through prayer but there are no faith-healers.

Any modern day local church which is obedient to Christ will see supernatural phenomena take place in their midst in the form of healings but not through faith healers.

Separation (5:13)

“But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.” -- The early Christians lived godly and separated lives so much so that there was no great effort from the masses of people to jump quickly into becoming Christians. The unsaved were filled with fear knowing what happened to Ananias and Sapphira, so they were slow to take a place in the fellowship of Christians. However, the unsaved had a high respect for those who called themselves disciples of Christ.

The curse of Christianity today is that so many in our churches are not saved. They are members of the church but their hearts are in the world. This, of course, kills the power of God and hurts the testimony of the true church. People should think twice before they become Christians for there is separation unto God and away from sin in following Jesus Christ.

Soul-winning (5:14)

“And all the more believers in the lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their numbers.” -- One of the marks of restored power was that many people were becoming Christians. People were turning to Christ and were willing to pay the price to be followers of Jesus Christ. The King James Version seems to have a more accurate translation: “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” When these people became Christians, they were added first to Christ, forming the spiritual body of Christ, the church. Becoming a Christian is being added to Christ not to a church roll. It is coming into a spiritual relationship with Christ in such a way that we share the very life of Christ. Christianity is being involved with a person and not an organization. It is quite possible to be a member of the organized church and not be a member of Christ's body. How do we become a true Christian? Believe in Christ and then the Holy Spirit adds us to Christ, putting us into spiritual union with Christ so that we share His life.

When God's power is flowing through a local body of believers, people will be saved and soul-winning will be a way of life because it is the Lord who adds people to His church.

Superstition (5:15)

“To such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on anyone of them.” -- Whenever there are any supernatural manifestations among men, there also arises among people a lot of superstition. Many folks brought the sick out into the streets hoping desperately that Peter's shadow would fall upon them and they would be healed.

This may have been the very beginning of superstition in the church. While wonderful things were happening, not everything happening was sound in the Faith. There is nothing in this verse which says that anyone was healed because Peter's shadow passed over them, and there is nothing which says Apostles encouraged this kind of activity. There is a superstitious side to most people and it was clearly manifested by bringing the sick to fall under Peter's shadow.

Today we have much of this same kind of superstition. Certain so-called faith healers tell people to write in for a handkerchief blessed by the healer to be healed, or to put their hands on the radio or TV and pray with the healer for a healing. There are hundreds of gimmicks used today to play on the superstitions of people and they are all unbiblical.

Supernatural Healing (5:16)

“And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits; and they were all being healed.” -- There was a mighty moving of God’s Spirit in the Apostles and many people were being truly healed. Notice carefully that every person on whom the Apostles laid their hands were healed.

When comparing this to modern day faith healers, it becomes obvious that not everyone who is brought to them is healed. In fact, most of the healings are due to psychological release rather than a physiological cure, and most of these who claim a healing will have the same affliction a few days, weeks, or months later.

In my last church I had a very emotional woman who attended her Assembly of God church for experiences and my church for doctrinal understanding. She claimed she had been healed four times from asthma. Two times in healing meetings and two times when she laid her hand on the TV set and prayed with the healer. Yet she still had asthma and it was so bad at times she could hardly breathe. She never was healed in the New Testament definition of healing, for those healings were always permanent and everyone was healed.

CONCLUSION

Saved. Are you a Christian who lacks power? Could it be that sin in your life is checking and restraining God's power? Are you indifferent, rebellious and in unbelief? If you are, you need to right your life before God, confessing your sins so the life of Christ and His power can flow through you to others. Sin always holds back the power of God in the individual Christian and in the life of the local church. By your unbelief, rebellion or indifference to God, you may be holding back God's power on this local congregation. Beloved, if you have lost your first love, repent and God will restore power to you.

Unsaved. If you are not a Christian, if you have never trusted in Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, God's message to you is that Christ heals the soul wounded by sin. His balm of forgiveness soothes the soul and His gift of eternal life makes the human spirit come alive to God. What must you do to be spiritually healed? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and when you do, then you will come to understand that God has done a miracle in your life. You will then begin to experience the life and the power of Christ, for you will be a new creature in Christ.