

• Lesson 6 (Acts 4:32-5:11) • Of One Heart and Soul

In Acts 4:32-5:11 our attention is briefly turned from the courageous work of the apostles to the fruit of their labor in Jerusalem that is evident in the sincere devotion of a multitude of new believers. God was powerfully at work in transforming thousands of individual lives into an extraordinary fellowship. These new Christ-followers were united, compassionate, unselfish, and generous. They were a living testimony to the truth of Jesus' promise: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Sadly, however, not all acted out of sincerity and the time quickly came for sin to be forcefully nipped in the bud. A deadly combination of greed and craving for the praise of men gave birth to sin, the swift consequences of which struck fear into the hearts of all who heard of it.

Faith Demonstrated by Works

Luke begins this section of his orderly account with a beautiful description of authentic unity.

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.
(Acts 4:32)

- ⇒ Practically speaking, what does it mean to be "of one heart and soul"?
- ⇒ How had this "full number of those who believed" been transformed to the point of being "one heart and soul"?
- ⇒ Were these people a living fulfillment of Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-21? If so, in what way, and how were their lives a powerful witness to the fact that Jesus had in fact been sent by the Father?

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There are a multitude of New Testament passages that prescribe and describe the unity Christ's disciples are to exhibit, but the mindset behind the self-sacrificial actions of Acts 4:32 is perhaps best encapsulated by Paul's instructions in Philippians 1:27-2:11. Take your time with that section of Scripture.

- What does it mean to "let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil 1:27)?
- Break down the "So if there is any" elements of Philippians 2:1. What do they mean and what impact do they have on our lives?
 - ◊ "Encouragement in Christ" -
 - ◊ "Comfort from love" -
 - ◊ "Participation in the Spirit" -
 - ◊ "Affection and sympathy" -
- How will "selfish ambition and conceit" keep me from following in the footsteps of those fully-devoted followers in Acts 4?
- "In humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil 2:4). Why is this lifestyle such a powerful witness for the truth of the gospel, even today?
- What is weighing you down and hindering you from living with this sort of Christ-exalting mindset?

⇒ “And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, *and great grace was upon them all*” (Acts 4:33). What do you make of that last phrase? What is Luke communicating?

⇒ What wisdom is evident in bringing the proceeds of what was sold and laying it “at the apostles’ feet” for distribution “as any had need” (Acts 4:34-35)?

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One who possessed a particular quality was often called the “son” or “child of” that quality.

- James and John were given the name Boanerges by Jesus, “that is, Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17).
- Jesus referred to Judas Iscariot in a prayer to his heavenly Father as “the son of destruction” (John 17:12).
- Those who are dead in trespasses and sins are described by Paul as “the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2).

So Joseph was called by the apostles Barnabas, which means “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36). *Paraklēsis* can be translated into English in various ways:

- *Comfort* or *consolation* - fitting because Barnabas was willing to listen to Saul of Tarsus when all the disciples were afraid of him and unwilling to welcome him into their number. Having listened, Barnabas brought Saul to the apostles and declared to them how on the road Saul had seen the Lord” (Acts 9:22-28).
- *Appeal* or *exhortation* - fitting because Barnabas would come to be known for his willingness and ability to exhort new believers to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose (Acts 11:23; 13:1).

Barnabas was a man willing to do what he could to impact the hearts of people with comfort, encouragement, and exhortation.

Unfortunately, the story doesn’t end there. Carefully read Acts 5:1-11.

⇒ How would you summarize in your own words the pathway chosen by Ananias and Sapphira which led to serious trouble?

⇒ “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...?’” (Acts 5:3). What can we learn from this truly terrifying description of the heart behind Ananias’ actions?

⇒ One of the obvious questions raised by this account is, “How does this ‘filling of the heart’ occur?”

- “Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?” How does this question from Peter in Acts 5:4 help us understand how Ananias got himself into this serious situation?
- Reflect also on James 1:14-15. How does the calamity of sin occur? Retrace Ananias’ tragic steps as they have been generally outlined by James in the space below.

⇒ Taking the information provided by Luke into account, what do we know about the role Ananias’ wife Sapphira played in this ugly incident?

⇒ “And Peter said to her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.’” What is Peter doing in Acts 5:8?

Perhaps it is sadly appropriate that the first sin documented by Luke among these earliest Christians is hypocrisy.

⇒ In your own words, what is hypocrisy?

⇒ Is hypocrisy still a deadly pitfall for modern disciples of Jesus? If so, in what way? Where are the dangers?

⇒ THOUGHT QUESTION: “When Ananias heard [Peter’s] words, he fell down and breathed his last” (Acts 5:5). “Immediately [Sapphira] fell down at [Peter’s] feet and breathed her last... And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things” (Acts 5:10-11). Why would God act in such immediate and severe ways in response to the actions of this couple?

A-C-T-S made personal

Based on my study of Acts 4:32-5:11:

⋮ A - doration: God is worthy of my praise
because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture reminded me to evaluate...

T - rust: my **faith** in my Savior has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly helped and encouraged by...