One Heart and Soul

I. Introduction

A. <u>This Morning</u>

1. Every healthy church longs for unity. We want to be a people who genuinely love one another, bear one another's burdens, and faithfully witness to Christ together. But Acts reminds us that true Christian unity is both a beautiful gift and something that must be carefully guarded.
2. In these early chapters of Acts, Luke tells two stories simultaneously. On one hand, he describes the remarkable birth and growth of the church through the power of the Holy Spirit. On the other, he exposes Satan's strategy to destroy it. First came persecution from the outside. When that failed to stop the gospel, Satan turned to a more subtle attack—corruption from within through the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira. The enemy understands that if he cannot silence the church, he will seek to divide and compromise it.
3. Why? Because Christian fellowship is more than a gathering of like-minded people; it is, as one writer says, "an enterprise of divine character."[1] The church is God's people, indwelt by God's Spirit, participating in God's mission. That is why Luke begins this passage by describing the church as being "of one heart and soul." They shared more than beliefs—they shared a common life. Their unity of heart shaped their unity of action. Their way of thinking determined their way of living. Together they became a community marked by sacrificial love, open-handed generosity, and deep commitment to one another.
4. As we study Acts 4:32–5:11 this morning, we'll see that the Holy Spirit creates a unified people whose shared life is marked by grace, generous love, and wholehearted integrity.

II. One Heart and Soul

A. <u>Unity is a gift of God's grace. (4:32-34)</u>

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[1] David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. ; Apollos, 2009), 203.

1. Luke opens this section with a remarkable description of the early church: "Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32). This kind of unity was extraordinary. The church was made up of people from different regions, occupations, economic backgrounds, personalities, and life experiences. Left to themselves, they had little reason to become a deeply connected community. Yet they were united—not because they shared the same preferences or personalities—but because of the unity they have through their shared union in Jesus.
    a) Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
2. Notice what preceded this description of unity. In the previous passage, the apostles boldly proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus, the church gathered in prayer, and they were freshly filled with the Holy Spirit. The preaching of the gospel and the people's response to it became the catalyst for this remarkable unity. The gospel reconciled sinners to God, and in doing so it reconciled them to one another. Their common identity in Christ became greater than every difference that might have divided them.
3. Christian unity is never something we manufacture. As Warren Wiersbe writes, "This is a God-given spiritual unity, not a man-made organizational uniformity."[2] True unity is the gracious work of God. We can organize ministries, establish structures, and create programs, but only God's grace can produce hearts that genuinely love one another and live together as one.
4. Luke even points us to the source of this unity in verse 33: "And great grace was upon them all." The church's unity did not flow from exceptional leadership, favorable circumstances, or shared interests. It flowed from the abundant grace of God resting upon the community. Grace had transformed their hearts, and transformed hearts produced transformed relationships. Unity, then, is not something the church earns or achieves—it is a gift that God gives through the gospel and by the power of His Spirit.

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[2] The Bible Exposition Commentary

5. This is why one of our core values at Rogue Valley Fellowship is Community Shapes Us. We believe that through relationship with Jesus, He brings us out of a life of sin, destruction, and death and places us into a new family called the Church. In this family, we learn what it means to live together in intentional and sacrificial community by loving one another as Christ has loved us. As we are formed together into the people of God, we become a faithful presence to one another and a compelling witness to the world.
    a) That is exactly what Luke is describing in Acts 4. The early church wasn't simply gathering in the same place; they were being formed into a new kind of people. Their unity reflected the very character of the God who had saved them. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in perfect love and unity, God's people are called to embody a unity that displays His life to the world. Our unity, therefore, is not merely practical—it is profoundly theological. It bears witness to the God we worship.
6. Reflection Question: If Christian community is a gift of God's grace that shapes us into the likeness of Christ, how am I allowing myself to be formed by this family? Am I merely attending church, or am I intentionally participating in the kind of sacrificial, Christ-centered community that displays the gospel to one another and to the world?

B. <u>Unity is expressed through generous living. (4:35-36)</u>

1. If God's grace creates unity, then generosity is one of its clearest expressions. Luke tells us, "There was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34). That is a remarkable statement. It doesn't mean there was no poverty in Jerusalem; it means there was no unmet poverty within the church because God's people willingly cared for one another. Those who had resources recognized the needs of those who did not and responded with joyful generosity.
2. This generosity flowed directly from the gospel. As one scholar observes, "The gospel message about God's grace in Christ inspired a culture of self-giving in love."[3] God's grace had so transformed their hearts that they no

[3] Peterson, 205.

longer viewed their possessions primarily as tools for personal security or comfort but as gifts entrusted to them for the good of others. Another writer puts it this way: "The experience of God's transforming grace—God's 'great grace'—enables believers to work in partnership with God through dispossession of their self-interest."[4]

3. This was especially significant given the circumstances of the early church. Many who had come to faith in Jesus had paid a tremendous cost. Some had likely lost employment or been rejected by their families and social networks because of their allegiance to Christ. As a result, many believers found themselves in genuine financial need. Luke describes a community that responded unlike the surrounding culture. One commentator notes that in the Greco-Roman world generosity was often based on reciprocity—people gave to those who could one day return the favor. But the church operated according to a different economy. Believers cared for one another without expecting repayment. Their generosity looked less like a social transaction and more like the love and responsibility found within a family.[5]
4. That language of family is important. Luke literally says there was no one who "lacked" among them. These acts of generosity demonstrated their devotion to God and their commitment to one another. They viewed one another as brothers and sisters, worthy of compassionate care. Their unity was not merely an emotional feeling; it was expressed through tangible acts of sacrificial love.
5. Notice also that Luke never presents this generosity as coerced. The apostles did not impose a system of compulsory redistribution, nor did they require every believer to sell all their possessions. Their giving was voluntary. Hearts transformed by grace freely responded to the needs around them. They did not regard their possessions as existing exclusively for their own benefit and therefore were not enslaved by the need to hold tightly to them.

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[4] Abingdon Press, *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, 12 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015).

[5] Peterson, 204.

6. The Positive Example of the grace driven generosity.
    a) Luke now introduces us to a man who embodies the kind of life he has just been describing. His name is Joseph, but the apostles gave him the nickname Barnabas, which means "Son of Encouragement." That name would come to define his ministry. Here, Barnabas sells a field he owns and lays the proceeds at the apostles' feet so they can be distributed to those in need. His generosity wasn't motivated by recognition or obligation; it was simply the overflow of a heart transformed by God's grace.
    b) This brief introduction is more significant than it first appears. Barnabas will become one of the major figures in the book of Acts—a trusted leader, an encourager, the one who welcomes Saul when others are afraid of him, and the missionary companion who helps carry the gospel to the Gentile world. Luke introduces him here because this act of generosity reveals the kind of man he is. At the same time, Barnabas' wholehearted sincerity provides a striking contrast to the story that immediately follows. Where Barnabas gives freely out of love for God and His people, Ananias and Sapphira will seek the appearance of generosity while clinging to their own self-interest.
    c) Barnabas reminds us that generosity is never simply about money. It is about a heart that has been so captivated by Christ that it gladly releases whatever God has entrusted to it for the good of others and the advance of God's kingdom.
7. Reflection Question: If someone observed the way I use my time, my possessions, and my resources, would they see someone shaped more by self-interest or by the self-giving love of Christ? How might God be inviting me to express the unity of His church through practical generosity this week?

C. <u>Unity must be guarded from hypocrisy. (5:1-11)</u>

1. After the beautiful picture of unity and generosity in Acts 4, Luke suddenly introduces a story that feels shocking. That is exactly his intention. The

account of Ananias and Sapphira is not disconnected from Barnabas—it is deliberately set beside it. One commentator writes, "The case of Ananias and Sapphira is opposite that of Barnabas, though it was meant to look the same... They wanted to enjoy the acclaim of the church, as Barnabas did, without making a genuine sacrifice."[6]Outwardly, the two acts appeared identical. Both sold property. Both brought money to the apostles. Both appeared generous. But God saw what no one else could see—the heart.

2. Peter makes it clear that the issue was not how much they gave. They were under no obligation to sell their property, nor were they required to give all of the proceeds. Peter even says, "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?" (Acts 5:4). Their sin was not keeping part of the money. Their sin was pretending they had given everything in order to gain a reputation they had not earned.
    a) The language Luke uses is revealing. The verb translated "kept back" is the very same word used in the Greek Old Testament to describe Achan's sin after the fall of Jericho (Joshua 7). It is a word associated with financial fraud and secretly withholding what had been devoted to God. Luke wants us to hear the echo. Just as Achan's hidden sin threatened the covenant community at the beginning of Israel's life in the Promised Land, so Ananias and Sapphira's deception threatened the new covenant community at the beginning of the church's mission.
    b) Their hearts had become captive to familiar temptations: pride, the love of money, selfish ambition, and the praise of people. One scholar observes that their deceit was completely premeditated. They desired to appear more generous than they truly were because the approval of others mattered more to them than faithfulness to God. There is an important difference between Barnabas and Ananias. Barnabas was

[6] Frank E. Gaebelein, J. D. Douglas, and Dick Polcyn, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary : With the New International Version*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

recognized because he was genuinely generous. Ananias wanted the recognition without the sacrifice.[7]

(1) George MacDonald once wrote, "Half of the misery in the world comes from trying to look, instead of trying to be, what one is not." Jesus called that hypocrisy—wearing a mask, playing a part. Warren Wiersbe defines hypocrisy as "deliberate deception, trying to make people think we are more spiritual than we really are." That is exactly what Ananias and Sapphira were doing. “Manipulating their reputation was more important than allegiance to God…”[8]

c) This is a sobering warning for every church. Hypocrisy is rarely about money alone. Money simply exposed what was already happening in their hearts. The temptation remains the same today. We can cultivate the appearance of spiritual maturity while hiding sin. We can say the right things, serve in the right ministries, attend worship faithfully, and still quietly seek the approval of others more than the pleasure of God. We can become more concerned with our image than our integrity.

d) That is why integrity is essential to genuine community. Love without integrity eventually becomes performance. Generosity without integrity becomes manipulation. Worship without integrity becomes empty ritual. As one writer observes, "When people are untrue, they cannot be genuine. The result is that spiritual superficiality sets in."[9] A church cannot enjoy deep fellowship if everyone is wearing masks.

3. But why is God's judgment so severe? The answer lies in the identity of the church. The church is not merely a voluntary association of religious people. The church is the dwelling place of God by His Spirit. N.T. Wright points out, "If the church is the new Temple, with God really in the midst, that means

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[7] Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007), 223, 25.

[8] Bock, 227.

[9] Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, *The Niv Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1998), 200.

fear and trembling, not playing fast and loose...[10] The church is the place of God's presence [and] God's presence brings both grace and judgment."[11] This story reminds us that the God who graciously unites His people is also the holy God who purifies His people.

4. Notice, too, that Peter says Satan had filled Ananias' heart. This does not remove his responsibility. Rather, it reminds us that there is a spiritual battle surrounding the life of the church. Satan has always sought to undermine what God is building. He failed to silence the apostles through persecution in chapter 4, so now he attempts to corrupt the church from within. External opposition could not destroy the church, so he turned to internal deception. Ultimately, Ananias and Sapphira's lie was not merely against the apostles or the congregation—it was against the Holy Spirit Himself.
5. The early church understood that such hypocrisy could not simply be ignored. Left untreated, it would spread like a cancer through the body. We are often tempted to overlook sin, hoping it will quietly disappear. But hidden deception slowly erodes trust, weakens witness, and drains a church of its spiritual vitality. Love for the church sometimes requires the courage to pursue holiness.
6. This passage leaves us with a healthy sense of reverence before God. The author of Hebrews reminds us: "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28–29) And Paul exhorts the Philippians: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12–13)
7. Notice the balance. We live in the confidence of God's grace, but never casually. The God who fills His church with great grace is the same God

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[10] N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Acts: Rediscovering What the Church Was and Is* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 37.

[11] Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts : Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012), 295-96.

whose holy presence calls us to lives of honesty, humility, and repentance. Grace does not diminish holiness—it empowers it.

8. Reflection Question: Where am I tempted to wear a spiritual mask? Is there any area of my life where I care more about appearing faithful than actually being faithful? What would it look like this week to walk before God—and my church family—with greater honesty, humility, and integrity?

III. Closing Thoughts

A. The picture Luke gives us is both beautiful and sobering. The church is not held together by shared preferences, personalities, or programs. It is held together by the grace of God. Grace creates one heart and soul. That unity overflows into generous, sacrificial love for one another. And that unity must be carefully guarded by lives of honesty, humility, and integrity.

B. May we be the kind of church where God's grace shapes our hearts, our generosity reflects Christ's love, and our integrity bears witness to His holiness. For when the church lives as one heart and soul, we become both a faithful presence to one another and a compelling witness to the world.

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