

Introduction

Luke has portrayed a strong sense of unity among the apostles after Jesus' ascension and the continued solidarity of all believers after the Day of Pentecost when the church was born and began to grow. In Acts 1:14, the apostles and other believers prayed *with one accord*. In 2:1, they were gathered together *with one accord*. After three thousand believers became the nucleus of the church, they worshiped daily in the temple *with one accord* (2:46). Even after their first experience of persecution, the apostles and fellow believers continued to pray together *with one accord* (4:24) and were *of one heart and one soul* (4:32).

But life in the church was not without troubles and trials. Both deception from within and rejection from without began to threaten the unity of believers. As the majority of believers sought to honor and exemplify Christ in their lives through unselfishly loving their brethren, hypocrisy and deception crept into their midst. In addition, the religious rulers became even more contentious and antagonistic to the apostles' teaching. In the following passages we see how the church held up under these testings.

Outline of Acts 4:32-5:42

- I. Unity Within the Church - Acts 4:32-5:21
- II. Opposition From Outside the Church - Acts 5:22-42

I. Unity Within the Church - Acts 4:32-5:21

Although the unity of the church was threatened by the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, God used the situation for good and for growth.

A. One heart and one soul - Acts 4:32

These words show the oneness and love the believers had for one another. Because of this oneness, they were sensitive to those in the church who had material needs and they reached out to meet those needs. The wealthy freely shared with the poor and were not possessive of their possessions. Are you sensitive to needs within your church? Are you willing to share with those who have material needs? How can you reach out to a needy person this week?

B. Preaching with power - Acts 4:33a

God answered the apostles' prayer for boldness (4:29), and they continued to preach with *great power*. In spite of the fact that the religious rulers had threatened them, they continued to teach the truth of *the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*.

C. Great grace was upon them all - 4:33b

The word *grace* means *favor*, and in this instance probably has reference to the success of the ministry of the church. The believers' generosity in sharing with one another was no doubt a testimony which prepared many hearts to receive and respond to the apostles' preaching of *the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*.

When the gospel of the kindness, love, generosity, and power of God is preached from our pulpits today, wouldn't the message be more powerful if the example of kindness, love and generosity went along with it? What can you do to show kindness, love, and generosity to others in practical ways?

D. Providing for the poor - 4:34-37

There were many poor people who received the gospel and Luke shows how the church provided for them.

1. Voluntary generosity - 4:34-35

Those who had houses or land sold them voluntarily. The proceeds were *laidat the apostles' feet*, and the money was then distributed to the needy. (Note that the distribution was according to need and not to make everyone equal. Also, the selling of land and giving of the money was voluntary as seen in Acts 5:4. This was not communism or socialism!)

In Matthew 6:19, Jesus had taught, *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.* The believers of the early church did not accumulate material possessions for themselves. They laid their treasures at the apostles' feet and in doing so they were being *rich toward God* (Luke 12:21). Are you rich toward God with what He has given you?

2. Example of generosity - 4:36-37

Josef (Joseph), who was called Barnabas by the apostles, is an example of one who gave to help the needy. He sold his land and laid all the money at the apostles' feet.

a. Barnabas was a Levite - 4:36

Of the twelve tribes of Israel, Barnabas was a descendant of Levi, the tribe that was designated by God to perform the service of the sanctuary for the priests (Numbers 3:6-9). (The priests were also of the tribe of Levi, but specifically from the family of Aaron.) It is interesting that Barnabas owned land, because the Lord had commanded that the Levites were not to have an inheritance in the land (Numbers 18:20-24). It is conjectured that, being from Cyprus, Barnabas' property was probably there and owning the land was permissible because it was outside of Israel. It is also possible that the restriction on owning land was no longer observed.

b. Barnabas was a Son of Encouragement - 3:36-37

The name given to him certainly attests to his character, as we shall see further on in Acts.

E. Dealing with deception - Acts 5:1-11

Although everything seemed good within the church, there were also problems, as the first word of chapter 5, *But*, indicates. Luke shows the open generosity of Barnabas in stark contrast to the selfish deception of Ananias and Sapphira.

1. Infamous hypocrisy - 5:1-4 and 7-9

a. Ananias' and Sapphira's sin - 5:1-2 and 7-8

As husband and wife, they had sold a piece of land. However, instead of laying it all *at the apostles feet*, Ananias, with the knowledge of his wife, and with deliberate intent to deceive, took only a portion to the apostles. His sin was not his failure to share all he

had, but his hypocrisy. He pretended to be generous and give all, but he was really stingy and not rich toward God.

Later, when Sapphira appeared before the apostles, she showed that she shared in the sin by affirming Ananias' lie.

b. Peter's confrontation of the sin - 5:3-4 and 9

Apparently the Holy Spirit revealed the evil deed to Peter. His first question to Ananias was, *Why has satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?* The word *filled* here is the same Greek word that is used in Acts 4:8 where Peter was *filled with the Holy Spirit*. It means to be *controlled* or *influenced*. The inference here is that Ananias had other unconfessed sin in his life, otherwise he would not have given in to the influence of satan and allowed himself to be controlled by him. All believers need to keep short accounts with God. The apostle John wrote, *If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:8-9).

Peter pointed out that the land had belonged to Ananias to do with whatever he pleased. He was not under obligation to sell it. After he had sold it, the money was in his own control. He had every right to keep some of the money for himself, but he had no right to lie and deceive. Peter told Ananias that he had not lied to men but to God. Actually Ananias had lied to men, but this was insignificant in comparison with his sin against God (5:4) and the Holy Spirit (5:3).

When Sapphira appeared and also lied to Peter, the apostle showed her the evil of her sin. She and her husband had agreed together to *test the Spirit of the Lord*. They had acted in deception, as if the Spirit of the Lord would not find out and be grieved. They had sinned against the Spirit and thought they could get away with it!

c. Judgment of the sin - 5:5-6 and 10

God's judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira was death. This couple is an example of committing sin which leads to death (1 John 5:16). Their blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:29) brought swift and severe punishment, that they might stand as an example for others. In situations like this, it is always better to learn from the example of others rather than from personal experience.

2. Impression it made upon the people - 5:11

Fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard. Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr.) defines this fear as not just a *fear* of God's power and righteous retribution, but a wholesome dread of displeasing Him. This writer wonders how many people today have a wholesome dread of displeasing God. Do you?

NOTE: This is the first time the word *church* is used to refer to the body of believers. The Greek word is *ekklesia*, a word used in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) to refer to Israel as the people of God. Throughout the rest of the New Testament, it is used to refer either to the whole body of believers or to a local congregation. It is never used to refer to a building.

F. Signs and wonders - Acts 5:12-16

The judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira had a purifying influence on the church.

The believers continued to meet *with one accord* at the temple area known as Solomon's Porch and *none of the rest dared join them*. *None of the rest* would seem to be those who were not *with one accord* with the believers, such as unbelievers, the insincere, the superficial, hypocrites, or anyone who might have had an idea of aligning themselves with the church under false pretenses. In spite of this, *multitudes* of both men and women came to believe and the church continued to grow.

The apostles continued to perform miracles among the people, healing the sick and casting out unclean spirits. The news even spread to surrounding cities and many were coming to Jerusalem seeking healing. Sick people were carried in their beds out into the streets in hopes that Peter's shadow might fall upon them as he passed by. Some scholars think there is a hint of superstition in this act, but it may also be compared to the faith of the woman with the hemorrhage who believed that if she could just touch Christ's garment she would be made well. Jesus did not rebuke her for superstition, but told her, *Daughter, your faith has made you well* (Mark 5:34).

II. Opposition From Outside the Church - Acts 5:17-42

The miracles and the gathering of the crowds to be healed did not escape the attention of the religious rulers.

A. Second arrest of the apostles - Acts 5:17-25

The high priest and the Sadducees were *filled with indignation*, translating the Greek word *zelos* which has the connotation of *envy, wrath, and zeal*. These rulers were envious of the success of the apostles. They hated the gospel which the apostles taught because it affirmed the resurrection of the dead which the Sadducees denied. They were also angry because the apostles had disobeyed the orders of the Sanhedrin. They arrested the apostles and had them put in the public jail.

1. The miracle - 5:17-20

That night as the apostles sat in prison, God sent an angel to open the prison doors and release them. This is the first of three prison miracles in Acts. The others are found in Acts 12:6-10 and 16:26-27.

The angel instructed the apostles to go to the temple and preach the gospel message to the people. With all boldness, they were to stand publicly in the temple, right under the noses of the priests and rulers, and continue to proclaim *the words of this life*, words pertaining to eternal life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The apostles had been delivered from one danger only to be sent into another dangerous situation. In his Commentary, Matthew Henry notes that God does not release us from danger and trouble *that we may enjoy the comforts of our life, but that He may be honored with the services of our life*.

2. The obedience of the apostles - 5:21

The apostles did exactly what they had been told to do. As they proclaimed the words of life to the people, the high priest was busy assembling the Sanhedrin and *all the elders of the children of Israel* to try their case. This time even the lower officials, those who were not a part of the Sanhedrin, were summoned to the trial of the apostles. Now everyone would have an opportunity to hear the gospel.

3. The confusion of the prosecutors - 5:22-25

It was not until officers were sent to the prison to fetch the apostles and deliver them to the council that it was discovered they were missing. How ironic that the highest court in Israel had met to judge prisoners they did not have. How ironic that the prison guards had spent most of the night guarding empty cells. How ironic that as the highest officials *wondered what the outcome would be*, the apostles were in the temple obeying the Lord. The priests and other officials must have been dumbfounded when someone came and told them that the men they had put in prison were now standing in the temple, freely teaching the people!

B. The trial - Acts 5:26-33

1. The rearrest - 5:26-27

The captain of the temple guard and his officers were sent to bring the apostles back for trial. The apostles went peacefully allaying the fears of the officers who thought they might be stoned by the people if they had to use force.

2. The accusations - 5:28

The high priest charged the apostles with two offenses. First, they had disobeyed the former command of the Sanhedrin (4:18) not to teach in Jesus name. Secondly, they were trying to blame the members of the Sanhedrin for the crucifixion of Jesus (4:10).

3. The apostles' answer - 5:29-32

a. The defense - 5:29-31

The apostles' answer, *We ought to obey God rather than men*, is a reaffirmation of what Peter had told the council on the occasion of his first arrest, *Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge* (4:19). The argument which follows this time is also a repetition of the message Peter had preached before (4:10-12). The men of the council had *murdered Jesus by hanging on a tree*. On the other hand, God had raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to sit at His right hand to be both Prince and Savior. The reasoning of this argument is very rational. The Jews had afflicted Jesus with dishonor and shame, but God had crowned Him with glory and honor. So whose side should the apostles be on? The answer should be clear.

b. The indictment - 5:30-31

As to the second accusation, Peter had previously charged the Sanhedrin with the crucifixion of Jesus. In light of the high priest's accusation, the apostles affirmed that charge and also exposed the magnitude of their crime. They had *murdered* their *Prince and Savior* who had come to give repentance and forgiveness of sins. They had murdered their Messiah!

c. The invitation - 5:31-32

Peter's answer is not just an indictment but also an invitation to the Jewish rulers to repent and be forgiven. They had murdered their Messiah, but God had raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to a position of power. The fact that Christ had been resurrected meant that they now had another chance. If they would repent, their sin would be forgiven. Christ had come for that very purpose!

The apostles were *witnesses* of what God had done in and through Jesus Christ. The

word *witnesses* does not refer to observers, but to those who bear witness by their testimony. The apostles had been called by God to testify to who Christ is and to what God had done for Him. The Holy Spirit bore witness along with them, as evidenced by the bold preaching and the miracles.

4. The anger of the council - 5:33

The hearts of the Jewish rulers were hardened even more. They were furious to see their sin exposed. They wanted to kill the apostles. What a contrast between the response of the crowd in 2:37 and the response of the council here. The crowd was *cut to the heart* with sorrow and repentance. The council was *cut to the quick* (NASB) with rage and indignation.

C. Advice from Gamaliel - Acts 5:34-39

Gamaliel was a very influential teacher of the Law. He was a Pharisee, the religious party which did not oppose the doctrine of the resurrection as the Sadducees did. There were fewer Pharisees on the council but they were very popular and the Sadducees did not dare to oppose them. Therefore, all listened as Gamaliel spoke and warned against taking rash action.

1. Trust in God's providence - 5:34-38

Gamaliel warned the council to let the apostles alone. He reasoned that *If this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it* (5:39). He gave examples of other troublesome movements which had died out on their own, showing that there was no cause to worry about this new group.

a. Theudas - 5:36

Theudas had been the leader of about 400 men. He had been killed, all his followers were scattered, and that was the end of the rebellion. The Jews had killed Jesus, so if He was an impostor, the interest in the apostles and their teaching would soon fade and they would be forgotten.

b. Judas of Galilee - 5:37

After Herod Archelaus (Herod the Great's son) was deposed as the governor of Judea, a Roman governor replaced him and a census was taken to determine the amount of tribute the Jews should pay to Rome. Judas of Galilee had stirred up a revolt, but the Romans had crushed it. He had been killed and his followers dispersed. Likewise, the followers of Jesus would also disappear soon enough.

2. Do not *fight against God* - 5:39

It would be best for the council to adopt a wait and see policy for now. If Jesus were merely a man, it would all come to nothing. However, if He were from God, the Jewish rulers could never overthrow it anyway. In fact, they would find themselves fighting against God. Was it not better to trust in the providence of God and let the matter work itself out! *This appeared to be wise counsel, but actually it was not. No one can be neutral about Christ. To delay making a decision is to court disaster. God had given every evidence through signs and miracles that He was at work, and there was no reason to put off making a decision* (Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament, Warren W. Wiersbe.) Besides, Jesus had taught about what it meant to remain neutral: *He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters* (Matthew

12:30). Are you trying to remain neutral, or have you taken a stand for Jesus?

D. Apostles released - Acts 5:4 -42

The council agreed with Gamaliel. They had the apostles beaten (probably the traditional 40 stripes minus 1 - see Deuteronomy 25:3 and 2 Corinthians 11:24), commanded them again not to speak in the name of Jesus, and released them.

1. Rejoicing - 5:41

There was no sign of discouragement as the beaten and bloody apostles left the council chambers. They did not say one word against the council, but rejoiced that they had been honored to suffer for the name of Jesus. They had taken to heart Jesus' words in Matthew 5:11: *Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.*

2. Teaching and preaching - 5:42

The arrest and beating did not intimidate the apostles, but made them even bolder. Every day they went to the temple to preach Jesus as the Messiah. Every day they went from house to house teaching the people.