

THE ONCE AND FUTURE CHURCH

#7: One in Heart and Mind

March 11-13, 2006

^{4:32}All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. ³⁶Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), ³⁷sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. ^{5:1}Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ²With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. ³Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God." ⁵When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. ⁷About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." ⁹Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of those who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." ¹⁰At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. *Acts 4:32-5:11 TNIV*

Introduction: To say that the members of the early church were merely together is a tremendous understatement. Such was their unity of "heart and mind" that they were compelled to lay aside self-preservation in pursuit of God's Kingdom.

- I. Room for Everyone
 - A. The unity of the Early Church was both a unity of mission and a unity of concern.
 1. The believers were "one in mind."
 - B. The believers were "one in heart."

- C. This unity was facilitated by the amazing unselfishness of the believers.
 1. They knew they were stewards of God's creation, taking care of that which God owned.
 2. Whenever there was a need among the believers, they did whatever they could to meet it, even if it meant selling land or houses.
 3. The believers were not required to give away their possessions, but many chose to, as did Barnabas.
- II. No Room for Error
 - A. At this fragile stage of the church's formation, there was little room for error, especially disruption to the church's unity.
 - B. It is interesting to note that Acts 5:11 is the first time Luke refers to the believers in Jerusalem as a "church" (Greek *ekklesia*, meaning "a called out assembly of Christians").
 - C. Because God was protecting the unity of the church so carefully, he dealt harshly with Ananias and Sapphira for their deceit.
 1. This couple was neither required to sell their land nor to give all of the proceeds to the church.
 2. Apparently, they had made a public display of committing the entire proceeds of the land sale to God.
 3. The word the Bible uses to indicate that the couple "kept back part of the money" is literally translated "to embezzle."
 4. The terminal sin of Annanias and Sapphira was not their failure to give, but their intention to deceive God and His church, imperiling the church's unity and purity.
 5. Both Annanias and Sapphira paid with their lives.
- III. Making Room for the Spirit's Work
 - A. Other than the actual presence of Christ, the primary assets of the church are still its mission and its compassion.
 - B. God jealously guards the unity and purity of His church.
 - C. We are called to be good stewards of God's possessions whose generosity makes room for the Holy Spirit to work.
 - D. The twin connectors of the church are the love of Christ and the proper fear of God.

Conclusion: When God prepares to use His church, he unifies and purifies his people. He is still looking for "sons [and daughters] of encouragement whose selflessness makes room for the Holy Spirit to work. If a church would be used powerfully by God, there is still little room for error. We must be "one in heart and mind."