

Of One Heart & Soul

In this morning's passage, Luke is reminding us of the character and heart attitude of these early believers. They had an incredible sense of fellowship and oneness. Since this is the second time such radical sharing is mentioned, the first being found in chapter 2, verses 42 to 47, these two passages tell us this unity and sharing of resources is importance.

When the disciples left the council, they rejoined the waiting Christians and had an impromptu worship service, thanking God for the outcome of their first significant encounter with the rulers of this dark world. Apparently, they broke into prayer instinctively, for the text says in verse 24, "**When they heard it** (*the report of Peter and John*), **they lifted their voices together in prayer to God**". They prayed and as they prayed, God brought to their mind Psalm 2.

When God's people worship Him, they always do two things: they pray and they reflect on the Scriptures. Prayer is our talking with God and the Scriptures is God talking to us and prayer and scripture open our heart, soul and mind to Him, and the two always go together. **You pray in a right way when you pray scripturally. You study the Scriptures in a right way when you study prayerfully.** This is what this church was doing. They had been reflecting on the Scriptures. Now, as they began to pray, the Scriptures rose up in them, and they found themselves talking to God in God's own words.

If we reflect on this for a minute, this is amazing. Why? Because it was not long before this, maybe 7 or 8 weeks, when they did not even understand the Old

Testament. Jesus had taught them that He had to fulfill the Scriptures by being arrested by the chief priests, delivered up to the Gentiles, tried, beaten, crucified, and resurrected. Jesus was the greatest teacher that ever lived. He was expounding the Scriptures and the Scriptures were clear, but these same believers did not get it because it did not fit their preconceptions. But now with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit it has all come together and everything has changed.

Joined As One

In what can only be called an amazing change these believers were now of one heart, soul and mind. Go with me to Acts chapter 4 and read with me the first half of verse 32, “[Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul](#)”. Luke says the “[full number](#)” there was a deep sense of unity of the entire church. This was a miracle of God; followers who had been struggling for position are now in unity. Today, in many circles, followers of Jesus are not known for being of “[one heart and soul](#)” and mind. There is little unity between different denominations or even churches within a denomination. Sometimes churches are known for being more contentious than unified. Denominations have done more to divide the Church of Jesus Christ than bring unity. Many denominations began over people seeking power and control not doctrinal positions, so they started their own denomination seeking power and position. This is just like the conflicts between the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jokes often have a foundation of truth and that is what makes them humorous and sometimes sad. There are the jokes, unfortunately with some truth to them, about churches dividing over the color of the carpet. Churches have fought over whether there should be pews or chairs and then about what color they should be.

That reminds me of the story of the pastor who was assigned a church overseas. He boarded a ship and headed out. During the journey there came a great storm, the ship was lost and the pastor was the lone survivor washed up on the shore of a small island. After a couple of years, the pastor saw a ship on the horizon and lit the signal fire. The ship responded and came to the island. The pastor paddled out to the ship and as he boarded the captain asked, “Are you the only one?” The pastor replied, “Why, yes.” The captain said, “I do not understand - for I see 3 huts.” “Oh”, the pastor replied, “the first hut is where I live, the second hut is where I go to church and the third hut is where I use to go to church.”

When we become part of church community God calls each person to be committed, like in marriage, to be a covenant community where we work together to grow into a community serving and glorifying God and caring for one another. We are to edify each other, correct each other and do it all out of love, first for God and then for each other.

One of the keys to unification within Christ’s Church is leadership. In the Gospels, it was often noted that the disciples argued among themselves. I take you to Luke chapter 9, ⁴⁶ “An argument started among them (*the disciples*) about **who was the greatest** of them. ⁴⁷ But Jesus, knowing their inner thoughts, took a little child and had him stand next to him. ⁴⁸ He told them, ‘**Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me welcomes him who sent me. For whoever is least among you—this one is great.**’” (vs. 46-48) Apparently, they argued over this jockeying for position at least twice because it is noted again in Luke chapter 22, verses 24 to 27. However, now here in Acts 4 they have become a unified group and their sense of unity spread to the entire church. When leaders are united it helps others be united as well. Deception, gossip, bickering and self-promotion destroy unity within the church, as we will observe in chapter 5

of Acts. But at this point they are fully and completely unified in mind and purpose; this is what “full number” and “one heart and soul” means. There was a spiritual unity of community and a unity of commitment to the mission given by Jesus. There was only one agenda – Jesus’!

Now we read verse 32 in its entirety, “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.”

It is important to point out this was not a form of socialism or communism. This was not a top-down system of controlling. What verse 32 is speaking of is the voluntary desire to meet the needs of others. The apostles did not tax people to get them to give. People wanted to give because they did not want anyone to be without. But to be clear, the sharing of property was not legislated or commanded by leadership. Further, leadership did not renounce the concept of private ownership. However, both leadership and the congregation recognized that all they had comes from God. What is most probable is there were wealthier members of the church who had extra. They sold some of their extra resources to meet the needs of the poor. We will look at this more when we reach chapter 5 of Acts.

With Powerful Testimony & Grace

Continuing in verse 33, “And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” Despite the threats the message of the gospel continued to be proclaimed. The gospel was proclaimed through preaching, prayer and caring for others. Despite threats they continued to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This was the one thing the Jewish leadership had commanded them not to do, but they did it anyway. They could not help but speak of the risen Lord. Jesus was and is the good

news! Death has been conquered. Your sins have been paid for by the blood Jesus. The way to God was now opened through Jesus Christ the Savior.

With All Needs Met

The church is family living in unity to fulfill the mission of God. Reading at verse 34, “There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold³⁵ and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.” This selling of property was something that was ongoing. When a need came up, the believers did what was necessary to meet the need. This was something the believers wanted to do for each other, as family, as church, as the Lord led them to do so. Several years earlier Jesus had taught principals that applied to His followers. Jesus taught,⁷ “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will **your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!**¹² So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:7-12) God often uses His children to fulfill the physical and spiritual needs of others.

I think it would have flowed like this in the early church. A need in the church family is reported. The brothers and sisters begin to pray about meeting the need. God laid it on someone’s heart to meet the need. The property is sold and the proceeds are brought to the apostles for distribution to those in need. In the early days, the apostles administered the funds, but eventually this was not the case.

They would appoint trusted men to be Deacons and tend to the physical needs of the congregation. Canyon Bible currently has 2 Deacons; David and Richard and their ministry is to oversee and meet the needs of the people of Canyon Bible Church and beyond. After leading their families spiritually this is their primary calling in serving God.

One of the things we need to remember is that community life is not an end to itself. Notice in the verses, sandwiched between the lines about community life is the declaration of the primary mission. They were all about proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Group unity centered around the gospel mandate. This was a witnessing community. This is a community living in unity for its own spiritual health and a healthy church by its very nature is a witnessing community of the glory of Jesus the Son and the Savior for to mankind.

What is Canyon Bible Church? How are we doing as a living community of God proclaiming Jesus Christ to the lost? Are there things we need to evaluate or change? How can we increase unity among us? After you have prayed about this, I would be very interested in hearing from you.

I want to go back and address the subject of unity again. Here is another question we need to consider. How does Canyon Bible, that is you and me or we, maintain the biblical standard of unity?

Eager To Maintain Unity

I begin with the teaching of Apostle Paul to the Ephesian church, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to **walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,** ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the

Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

(Ephesians 4:1-6) My beloved, do you consider others more important than yourself? Jesus considered your salvation more important than His life – is this not the standard He has left to us? No one was humbler in their nature than Jesus.

The word ‘humble’ is both an adjective and a verb. Jesus was the Son of the most Holy God and yet He humbled Himself because of His value for the mission of God the Father; the salvation of mankind. This was a principal the disciples had to learn in order to become Apostles and servant leaders. The Apostles learned and we must learn and live out what Paul instructed to the Philippian church, “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ **Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.** ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:1-8)

Does Philippians chapter 2 describe you? If it does not - then it cannot describe Canyon Bible, for we, are Canyon Bible. As a church we are to live in the humility of Christ.

My beloved, we need to adopt the mindset of Christ. It is clear Christ’s submission to the will of the Father and His humility is presented as the model for

us to emulate. Humility is a necessary ingredient to unity. There will be times when we annoy others or are annoyed by others. There will be things we do not like. However, we must be patient with one another and bear with one another in love. A humble person does not insist on having their own way. We should be willing to sacrifice non-essentials for the good of other believers. So, what are some non-essentials we could give-up for the benefit of other believers? Well, the non-essentials are **not** the core doctrines of God found in the Bible.

Let's prioritize a few things that are essential for living in community. These will help us understand what it means to be a living church of God. First as we have observed from God's Word this morning, unity is essential. Returning to Paul's instruction in Ephesians we just read, each member should be "[eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.](#)" (Ephesians 4:3) I think this is especially important for leaders. It is of vital importance for leaders in the congregation to prioritize and make unity a primary concern. Leaders cannot settle for anything less than unity. If unity is essential for leaders, as the model given by Christ, then it is also essential for each member of the church to strive for unity. Let me ask, who have you offended or rubbed the wrong way and need to ask for forgiveness in order to come into unity? Who have you responded to in an over-sensitive manner and harbor ill feelings toward and you need to seek their forgiveness? Hiding these things away is not dealing with them as God instructs and commands. Family is messy and church is family – so, let us come together in unity out of love and the common mission of glorifying God through the proclamation of the Gospel.

It is easy to observe and experience family does not grow closer and stronger during times of separation. My brothers and I are scattered; Montana, Florida and New Mexico. We are not close and even though I work at maintaining relationship, absence makes unity difficult. The same is true for Christians and Church; God's

Word teaches,²⁴ “let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,²⁵ **not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another**, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

(Hebrews 10:24-25)

Meeting together should be a regular occurrence. Gathering together is how we forge and maintain unity. God says it is important to be in church on a regular basis in order “**stir up one another to love and good works**”. When we are together, we encourage each other. I do not know about you, but living in this broken world I need encouragement. Being in church also prepares us for the coming Day of the Lord and this too is crucial. It is important we stay connected – it is important to your brothers and sisters that need your support with encouragement and even correction and it is also important for your spiritual wellness.

It is important that we have unity in the essential core doctrines of Scripture. As Acts 2:42 teaches “**they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**”⁴³ And awe came upon every soul ...” Without being in the apostles’ teachings on a regular basis we will not experience unity. As Paul expressed well in Ephesians chapter 2, “**So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,**”² **complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.**”³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Ephesians 2:1-8) We have spiritual unity only in God’s Word and Christ. There are things which are essential and things which are not essential. Worship and prayer are essential. Unity and prayer go hand in hand. The authority of God’s Word is essential. We must be committed to the truths of God’s Word. The mission given to the church by Christ is the spreading the Gospel, so this is essential. Teaching what Jesus taught His disciples is essential. It is around these essentials that we find our unity.

Living in harmony does not mean there is absolute agreement on everything. Agreement needs to be in the Bible as the only inspired truth given by God and Jesus the Christ. We must agree in the core beliefs or core doctrine – and this is why we have been working through these core beliefs and doctrines on Wednesday nights. This coming Wednesday is the study of Justification and Adoption – you should be there. On the core doctrines of Christianity there can be no compromise. This is why Paul charged the Roman church with ⁵“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 15:5-6) When one compromises with things of the world, they lose their peace and joy. The world wants us to pursue happiness, but the scriptures do not teach we should be happy or seek happiness. In Christ we experience something different from the fleeting happiness of the world, we experience ²²“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:22-24) I believe strongly for one to experience the “fruit of the Spirit” they need to be actively in church - living in unity with their brothers and sisters in Christ.

As the living church of Jesus, we are to be family, we are to live in unity, we are to live for the glory of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. Not being in church, not being in unison on the core doctrines of the Bible, not caring for our brothers and sisters and working to meet their needs - brings disunity and disunity opens the heart for the evil one to sow the seeds of spiritual confusion and for one to lose the fruit of the Spirit in their life.

So, my beloved, if you desire to experience God's "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control" in your life – then live in unity with your family of God; Canyon Bible Church. If you agree with what we have discovered this day from God's Word as prophesied by God's servants and preached by Christ's under-shepherd over His Church, we call Canyon Bible Church. If you agree – stand up and let me hear an Amen!