

Peter and John had just been threatened by the Sanhedrin to stop preaching and healing in the name of Jesus. They relayed the threat to their friends and immediately went to prayer. Their prayer was not for protection, but for boldness to go on proclaiming the Good News of Jesus. The Lord answered by shaking the building and filling them again with the Holy Spirit.

*32 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 We saw this at the end of chapter two, but it is reiterated here because we need to be reminded of how important it is to be in unity and have such a love for one another that we are willing to meet any needs we see. That does not mean that we enable people not to be careful with their spending habits, or to allow some to take advantage of others when they could work. Some of the believers in Thessalonica tried that. Paul's response was that if they refused to work they shouldn't be given food (2 Thessalonians 3:10-11). The New Testament is very realistic in dealing with human nature.

The prerequisite for their generosity was the fact that they had one heart and soul. The Greek words translated here as heart and soul mean that **their thoughts, desires, and life purpose were the same**. They knew Jesus had died for their sins and conquered death (Acts 2:38). They knew they were filled with the Spirit of the living God to go and proclaim that message to the world. There is a wonderful comradery in sharing the same heart and soul. Somehow you know when you meet someone that has that same passion for Jesus that you do. The love of God in you will help them if they have a need (1 John 3:17). I've seen that in this congregation countless times. Believers know their possessions are from the Lord and are at His disposal to use as He pleases.

That was a special time in church history. We'll see in the next verse that it was due to the great grace that was upon them all. Jesus warned that it wouldn't always be that way by teaching that there would be weeds amongst the wheat until the end. We are about to see the first effort of Satan to sow those weeds (Matthew 13:24-30). But remember, the church at that time consisted of the converts who came for the Pentecost Feast and who were filled with the Spirit, along with those who were converted at the time the lame man was healed. Many of them will go back to their homelands and take the Gospel with them. They needed to be strong and pure in their doctrines and convictions to be able to begin churches wherever they went or else the message would soon be corrupted.

*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.* Acts 4:33 The signs and wonders done by the hands of the Apostles confirmed their message that Jesus had conquered death and now has all authority. Their words came with great power. It still happens in the world today as the Holy Spirit proclaims that truth through people.

**Commented [PW1]: 2 Thessalonians 3:10-11 (KJV)**

<sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

<sup>11</sup> For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

**Commented [PW2]: Acts 2:38 (ESV)**

<sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Commented [PW3]: 1 John 3:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

**Commented [PW4]: Matthew 13:24-30 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field,

<sup>25</sup> but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

<sup>26</sup> So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also.

<sup>27</sup> And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?'

<sup>28</sup> He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?'

<sup>29</sup> But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.

<sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

When I knew I was called to pastor, I began watching preachers and asked myself why certain ones' messages came with power that others didn't seem to have. I concluded that it was not so much how they delivered their message, for Duncan Campbell and Jonathan Edwards preached with their faces in their sermon transcripts. It was not the eloquent words that they chose, for to simply read Moody and others' sermons just didn't carry the same impact (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). Nor did education seem to be the big difference. I concluded that it was their personal walk with the Lord, their love for His Word, and their utter surrender to the Lord's will for their lives that preceded the power. They were filled with the Spirit. These early believers needed to know the Apostles' Doctrine, but their personal relationship with Jesus invites the power of the Spirit to help them to build congregations in their hometowns. Someone has said that if you want to grow a church, get on fire for God and people will come to watch you burn. I would add that many who come to watch will catch on fire as well. We are attracted to genuine passion. The generosity of the early church was evidence of their conviction.

*<sup>34</sup> 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 sold <sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.* Acts 4:34-35 How amazing that early church was! The great grace that was upon them all was manifested in their love for one another (John 13:35). Selfishness had no place. It is interesting to me that they didn't meet the need directly, but brought it to the apostles. To lay it at their feet means to give it to be used as they saw fit. It was recognition of their authority. Apostles were the official representatives of Jesus, hand chosen by Jesus (Luke 6:13). Remember, Jesus didn't write a book. He invested all His teaching into these men who were then to pass it on verbally and later in writing.

Once the apostles received the money or goods, they distributed them as they saw the need. In chapter six we will see that this duty was given to the deacons (Acts 6:2-3). The important point is that the believers didn't seek recognition by giving the help directly to the need they saw. They trusted the discernment of the apostles as God's appointed leaders. That is how we deal with the benevolent fund in this church. In that way, you can help those in need anonymously (Matthew 6:4). Of course, there is an accountability system in place.

*<sup>36</sup> Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, <sup>37</sup> sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.* Acts 4:36-37 Luke chose an example of a man who would appear later in this book to demonstrate how the needs of this growing community were met. One of the early church fathers wrote that Barnabas was one of the seventy-two disciples that Jesus sent out (Luke 10:1).

*<sup>1</sup> But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, <sup>2</sup> and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.* Acts 5:1-2 Here we have that sowing of the weeds I mentioned earlier. The movement was growing and gaining popularity. That

**Commented [PW5]: 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,  
<sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

**Commented [PW6]: John 13:35-36 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."  
<sup>36</sup> Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward."

**Commented [PW7]: Luke 6:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles:

**Commented [PW8]: Acts 6:2-3 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.  
<sup>3</sup> Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

**Commented [PW9]: Matthew 6:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**Commented [PW10]: Luke 10:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.

attracts people who are seeking power or position. You might say they want to be big fish in a little pond. They are not filled with the Spirit. They are not surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus. As the next verses will show, there was nothing wrong with keeping part of the sale price. Giving was voluntary. Unlike numerous cults today, you could do what you wanted with your possessions; you just needed to be honest about it.

*<sup>3</sup> But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?"<sup>4</sup> While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God."*

Acts 5:3-4 The Spirit gave Peter supernatural knowledge of what had transpired. It was a Satanic attack on the unity and purity of the early church. Satan filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit. After seeing the miracles that the Apostles performed and hearing the wonder of the resurrection and teachings of Jesus, Ananias allowed his heart to be filled with Satan's lie rather than to be filled with the Spirit. He may have thought he could deceive Peter, but you can't deceive the Holy Spirit.

Peter asked why he contrived the deed in his heart. I can only surmise that Ananias was seeking to become influential in the church by pretending to be totally dedicated while seeking position and influence for his own pride (3 John 1:9). We've had that kind of subversive deception in this church in the past. They will always seek leadership to advance their hidden agenda. Fortunately, your elders discerned it. I'd much rather face outright false doctrine than lying deceivers who have a hidden agenda.

*<sup>5</sup> When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.* Acts 5:5 God kept the early church weed free for as long as was needed to get the pure Gospel out to the world. Some people think the God of the Old Testament is harsh and quick to judge, while the God of the New Testament is all love and grace. That tells me they haven't read the Bible. The most commonly mentioned attribute of God in the Old Testament is steadfast love. In both testaments, His is just and holy (John 5:22). That means that even though He is gracious, He must be just (See Psalm 75).

The fear of God is a healthy thing for us all (Psalm 34:9). By that I don't mean constantly thinking that God will whack you for any mistake you make, but rather we should recognize that the holiness of God will not be compromised. *<sup>6</sup> By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.* Proverbs 16:6 We are so grateful for the steadfast love and grace of God, but we should never trample on that love and grace (Hebrews 6:4-6; Romans 6:1-2). As children of God we should expect God's discipline if we intentionally sin (Hebrews 12:10). Only God knows the havoc Ananias and his wife would have wrought had they been able to carry on their deception and bring compromise into the early church.

*<sup>6</sup> The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. <sup>7</sup> After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.*

**Commented [PW11]: 3 John 1:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

**Commented [PW12]: John 5:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,

**Commented [PW13]: Psalm 34:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!

**Commented [PW14]: Hebrews 6:4-6 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,

<sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,

<sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

**Commented [PW15]: Romans 6:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

<sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

**Commented [PW16]: Hebrews 12:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

Acts 5:6-7 Burials in Israel in the first century took place the same day the person died. Everyone would stop work and participate in the mourning process. That the wife didn't know her husband died meant there was no mourning process or gathering of the community as the man, having been smitten by God, was held in dishonor.

*<sup>8</sup> And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much."* Acts 5:8 Peter gave her a chance to come clean. It was a direct question. It reminds me of Jesus handing the morsel to Judas, a sign of friendship at the Last Supper, just before the betrayal (John 13:26). God gives us chances and confronts us with our sin so we can turn and not have to face the consequences.

*<sup>9</sup> But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out."<sup>10</sup> Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.* Acts 5:9-10 I've witnessed both the seemingly delayed judgments of God and the swift and sudden ones. It is no different today. Sometimes I wonder why God doesn't deal with a situation, but then, God knows so much more about the whole situation and the person's heart than I do. We must trust God. But know that you should never tempt God (Deuteronomy 6:16). And remember that when you have that direct question that gives you the chance to be honest, don't continue the lie. Most importantly, don't ever think you can lie to the Holy Spirit. We need a healthy fear of God in the church today. We would have more of it if we were willing to recognize God's swift dealings in our own lives and in others.

*<sup>11</sup> And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.* Acts 5:11 You can imagine how this judgment kept others from pretending to be believers. There is the same effect today in nations where Christians are persecuted. No one takes joining a local congregation lightly. They don't join to make business contacts. There is no pretending there. Only those who are willing to lay down their lives will join the fellowship of persecuted believers (1 John 3:16). I can't help but think that persecution will eventually purge the church in America of those who would pretend to be committed to Jesus.

*<sup>12</sup> Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico.* Acts 5:12 They were still meeting in the temple at this point. Signs and wonders were testifying to the truth of their message. That is one reason Ananias and Sapphira should have known better than to try to lie to the Holy Spirit. This also shows the protection of God over the believers that they could still meet there after being forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18).

*<sup>13</sup> None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.* Acts 5:13 This was the effect of the judgment of God. While the public knew something miraculous was happening, they wouldn't join the believers unless they were truly

**Commented [PW17]: John 13:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.

**Commented [PW18]: Deuteronomy 6:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.

**Commented [PW19]: 1 John 3:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

**Commented [PW20]: Acts 4:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

willing to be followers of Jesus at any cost. That isn't a bad thing. We aren't here simply for numbers of attendees. We are here to make disciples, dedicated, sold out, followers of Jesus (Luke 14:33; Matthew 16:24).

*<sup>14</sup> And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,* Acts 5:14 We saw at the end of Acts chapter two that the Lord added to the church daily (Acts 2:47). The rate of new converts was picking up. The threats of the Sanhedrin had not stopped the growth of the church. In fact, the opposite was true. The disciples had not given in to fear. This was a mighty move of the Spirit to begin the church. I pray for another move like that here before the return of Jesus.

*<sup>15</sup> so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. <sup>16</sup> The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.* Acts 5:15-16 The belief that a shadow could do harm or good was common in that day. God allowed them to be healed because of their faith, despite the superstition. God overlooks these false ideas if in the process we are being drawn to faith in Jesus. Can you imagine the scene, the power of the Spirit that was present, and the wonder when *all* were healed? This was beyond the *earthly* ministry of Jesus, and Jesus had predicted it would be so (John 14:12). Jesus is still at work, only now it is His life in and through His followers. What a glorious and yet fearful beginning of the church!

If you were there, would you have dared to join them? The decision is the same today, for God never changes (Hebrews 13:8). Today there are weeds among the wheat, and God allows it to be so. But even if you recognize you are a weed, there is hope. God can make anything new (Revelation 21:5). Transformation is possible (2 Corinthians 5:17). Every follower of Jesus is transformed. We were all by nature objects of wrath, but we threw ourselves upon the mercy of God (Ephesians 2:3-5). That is what this passage invites us to do. You may escape judgment in this life, but we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:10-11). No one will get away with lying to the Holy Spirit then. But those in Christ Jesus, who have trusted in what He did for them, will be found blameless (2 Corinthians 5:21). If you haven't already put your faith in Jesus, will you trust Him today?

#### Questions

- 1 What does one heart and soul mean?
- 2 What was unique about this time in church history?
- 3 How can our words be powerful and convincing?
- 4 Why are the apostles so special and trustworthy?
- 5 What was Ananias and Sapphira's sin?
- 6 Why was that so serious?
- 7 Why should we fear the Lord?
- 8 What was the effect on the public?
- 9 So why did more people convert?
- 10 Why were people healed despite superstition?

#### Commented [PW21]: Luke 14:33 (ESV)

<sup>33</sup> So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

#### Commented [PW22]: Matthew 16:24 (ESV)

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

#### Commented [PW23]: Acts 2:47 (ESV)

<sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

#### Commented [PW24]: John 14:12 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup> "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

#### Commented [PW25]: Hebrews 13:8 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

#### Commented [PW26]: Revelation 21:5 (ESV)

<sup>5</sup> And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

#### Commented [PW27]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

#### Commented [PW28]: Ephesians 2:3-5 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,

<sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

#### Commented [PW29]: Romans 14:10-11 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; <sup>11</sup> for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

#### Commented [PW30]: 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

<sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.