



April 14, 2024

“Unity of Purpose.”

Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30.

News:

Wednesday Evening Classes at 6:30
Church Cleanup on Saturday, May 4th ★ VBS June 17-21

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ACTS 4:32&33 ~

As a result of their being refilled by the Holy Spirit and speaking the word of God with boldness – the whole church was of one heart and soul.

They had purpose...

Almighty God has commanded us through His Word to love one another and to be unified through the power of the Holy Spirit. Why has the church failed?

Believers have proven themselves to be more concerned with self, than with God.

The church will never be unified by the Holy Spirit when its agenda is other than God's.

If someone disagrees with me, they are really disagreeing with God, and that makes them the enemy.

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

Stubbornness is nothing more than heightened opinion. Having an opinion is healthy. Respectfully voicing it when appropriate is helpful. Abandoning your opinion to be unified with the group decision is mature. Opinions are necessary but being opinionated is driven by ignorance, pride, and fear. Being stubborn is the proof of ignorance, pride, and fear.

Stubbornness is a relationship killer.

ACTS 4:34–37 ~

This is one of those passages that most people ignore.

In ignoring, we remain ignorant. When you find something in the Bible that you don't understand, or that goes against your sensibilities, or challenges your beliefs, it's not the time to close the Book, it's the time to open your mind.

A lot of people want America to be a Christian nation, but I doubt this is what they have in mind.

Laying the proceeds at the Apostle's feet was a sign of submission.

The example of this generous self-sacrificing unity was none other than the future Apostle Barnabas.

Biblical encouragement is exhortation.

ACTS 5:1–11 ~

When truth is distorted, it still seems true, but it isn't, and the line between the two grows fuzzy.

They did not feel like being as generous as they wanted others to believe that they were. What was one little white lie?

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____
Phone _____ Email _____

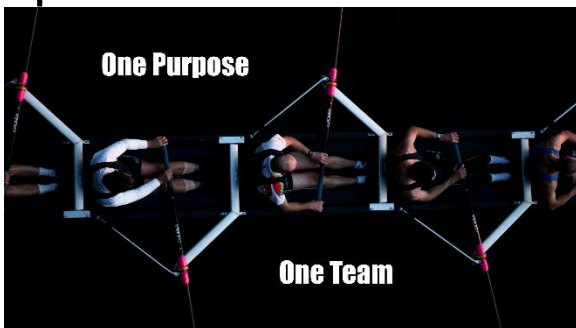


Peter and John had been arrested for publicly declaring that the Risen Lord Jesus, the One and Only True Christ, the Messiah that the Jewish Leaders had murdered, was the Source of the undeniably stupendous supernatural recreating of a man. A man who had been born unable to use his legs, but who now, after more than 40 years as a crippled beggar, was able to glorify God by jumping for joy.

The two Apostles and their new friend had been put on trial by the Jewish rulers and eventually released them with a strict gag order. While they were free to go, they

were forbidden to teach, preach, or proclaim, in the name of Jesus anymore.

They reported everything to the growing Christian community and through prayer and passionate, but loving discussion, came to a full and unanimous agreement. They beseeched God to grant them fearless boldness in actively violating the governing authorities court order. They prayed, “And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant it to Your bond-servants to speak Your word with all confidence.” What happened when they prayed that way? “The place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:29&31).



Acts 4:32&33, 32And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.

As a direct result of their being refilled by the Holy Spirit Who enabled them to begin speaking the word of God with boldness – the whole church was of one heart and soul. They were all rowing together because for a very brief moment in time they were more focused on the goal than on themselves.

Notice that this is at least the third time that the Holy Spirit filled some of the same people. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of ministering God's grace to others is an anointing, as necessary. It is given as needed and re-given as it is used.

When a group of people are:

- 1) focused on the mission they are unified in their purpose.
- 2) Few things bring greater harmony to a group than pursuing a common purpose.
- 3) That is especially true if there is opposition to them achieving their goal. The “us versus them” mentality has tremendous unifying power.
- 4) Additionally, the more important the objective and the greater the sense of urgency in achieving it, the easier it is to be united.

5) Finally, nothing can unify more than the power of the Holy Spirit if He is allowed to have preeminence within each individual in the community.

Almighty God, the God we supposedly worship, trust, and obey, has commanded us through both His Word in human form and through His Word in written form to love one another and to be unified through the power of the Holy Spirit. Why has the church, through most of its iterations over the centuries been so incredibly the opposite, so insanely divisive and splintered?

In a word, self. The Community of Believers has always been far more concerned with self, than with God. Don't believe that? Just look at the evidence.

The church will never be unified by the Holy Spirit when its agenda is other than God's. Even when we focus on the true mission of the church there is disagreement, devolving into dissention, devolving into divorce. Why? Again, only because people put self ahead of God by elevating their opinion on how to build His Kingdom to the level of divine irrefutable prophecy.



If someone disagrees with me, they are really disagreeing with God and that makes them a wolf in sheep's clothing who must be despised, if not destroyed.

We are so full of ourselves there is little room for the Holy Spirit within us. I get it; believe me, I get it. When I think a thing should go a particular way, I believe that I'm right, If I didn't believe that I was right, I would change my mind on how I think the thing should go – obviously. Of course, I think that I have the correct idea – we all think that about our ideas, or we wouldn't continue to hold them.

You randomly grab any 5 dudes in this church right now and give them a simple construction project. "Guys, we need a gate in the fence." There will instantly be five different opinions on the best course of action and every one of those guys will think that their opinion is the one that is correct. They will suspect that the other four are really wolves.

Stubbornness is nothing more than heightened opinion, where you take thinking that you're right to the new level of knowing you're right. Having an opinion is healthy. Respectfully voicing your opinion when appropriate is helpful. Abandoning your opinion to be unified with the group decision is mature. Opinions are necessary but being opinionated is driven by ignorance, pride, and fear. Being stubborn is the proof of ignorance, pride, and fear.



You must resist being opinionated and you must absolutely reject being stubborn. Stubbornness is what doomed the Jews. The Bible calls such people stiff-necked and unteachable. They are thorns that cause disunity.

Such people are afraid of change because of their ignorance about other options, their fear of losing control, and their prideful unwillingness to even consider another way.

Stubborn people have trouble admitting when they are wrong. They would rather argue than suffer a blow to

their ego. They will deflect criticism by blaming the person criticizing them. I wouldn't have cheated if you'd treated me better.

Stubborn people don't change their mind and so cheat themselves out of growth and transformation. They cling to past beliefs in a misguided effort to protect themselves from change.

Stubborn people lash out at those who challenge their ideology, beliefs, or worldview. They often can't speak with facts or figures, so they resort to personal attacks. Insulting a person's character is much easier than addressing their point.

Stubborn people only accept news from sources that confirm their biases. They don't want to risk exposing themselves to conflicting information, because that could cause an identity crisis. Cognitive dissonance is avoided by not listening to alternative ideas.

I bring it up because almost every person who has left a church family has done so because they believed that they were right. Almost every person who has divorced, almost every person who has walked away from a friend, almost every time we break fellowship

and association it is because we were stubborn. Stubbornness is a relationship killer.

It is the norm in our culture today and is an evil that must be actively fought with the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the common notion that “I know that I’m right, they disagree with me or are not following my advice, which makes them wrong, and I can only put up with so much wrong.” Opinionated people cause division, stubborn people cause devastation. Now the final bit of truth about this topic... Sadly, stubborn people will not see how any of this applies to them.

The hope is that through the power of the Holy Spirit and a new commitment to proclaiming the Gospel, our whole church would become better informed, more humble, and less fearful, and that we, like them, would be “of one heart and soul.”



Acts 4:34–37, 34For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they

would be distributed to each to the extent that any had need. 36 Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), 37 owned a tract of land. So he sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

This is one of those passages that most people ignore. It's like Jesus commanding us "do not show opposition against an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other toward him also" (Matthew 5:39). We don't like that and so we disregard it and focus on the bits of the Bible that better resonate with us.



In ignoring, we remain ignorant. I was talking with some of the young ladies in the church about the teaching method of Jesus. He continually asked the people open-ended questions and when He did make statements, they were incredibly unexpected, oftentimes strange, and even bizarre. His purpose was to get people to think, to shock them out of their stubbornness and get them to reevaluate.

When you find something in the Bible that you don't understand or that goes against your sensibilities or challenges your beliefs, it's not the time to close the Book, it's the time to open your mind. Wrestle with God through prayer and study and thinking, and in so doing yield to His reforming of your heart.



The church in Jerusalem for a very short period of time very much resembled Heaven and was a taste of what a physical Christian world would look like. It did not last, and it cannot be replicated for very long because we are all too broken, too selfish, too human to allow the Holy Spirit to have such control over us as a group.

It's never long before someone feels cheated in some way and the whole human dumb show begins. We will see the first crack in that remarkable church today.

A lot of people want America to be a Christian nation. but I doubt this is what they have in mind. What we see here in these few verses is the social order and proper governance that Almighty God would ideally have us

Christians follow... We would all remain autonomous free individuals choosing without manipulation to be entirely committed to our church family. As a truly loving family, none of us would think twice about using our personal resources to help our siblings in need, without judgment of their situation.

Let's say that Rob and I go hunting and while out it turns brutally cold. Let's say that he doesn't have a coat, but that I happen to have two. How long do I need to debate before I hand him my extra? If I'm a decent Christian brother, no time at all, if I'm a fearful fleshly human, I'll need to make him pay in one way or another.

Notice that in the snapshot of the church that we're getting here we do not have socialism, we have love. What I mean is that no one was being forced to give. Notice also that the giving was to supply actual needs that others had, not merely to bring them all to an equal economic state by redistributing wealth. They were brothers and sisters who loved each other without judgment or resentment. Without condescension or entitlement.



Laying the proceeds at the Apostle's feet was a sign of submission. A submission to God, not the Apostles themselves, but please realize that the Apostles were the representatives of God. The gesture meant that the person was giving their gift freely and without encumbrance to God and His purposes by trusting that his human representatives would use it properly.

Notice that there was no dictator, no king, no president. There was a God ordained council of leaders. Peter was the Apostle Jesus left in charge, but it was never as an authoritarian autocrat, but as the head Elder among equals. Peter was the leader, not the ruler. That's a huge difference from the Jewish Council. Peter led by example, and he led with the full counsel of the other Apostles. He led as an agent of Jesus fully submitted then to God, to his fellow Elders and to the people whom He served.

Christian leadership is never to be a privileged and profitable position as the Jews had made it, but instead it is always a position of self-sacrificing service, being

responsible to God, being accountable to the other leaders, and being burdened for the people.

Should such leaders be respected? What's interesting about human nature is that we honor the ones who elevate themselves over us as tyrants and we take for granted those who lower themselves as servants.

Finally, notice that all this unbelievable unity was the result of verse 33, “with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.” The church was unified in the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel.



The example of this generous self-sacrificing unity was none other than the future Apostle Barnabas, who, with Paul, would evangelize what is now central Turkey on Paul's First Missionary Journey.

His given name was Joseph, which was one of the most common names among Jews in the first century. In fact, back then it was extremely rare to meet someone with an uncommon name. In most of the

world it's the same today. In America, the melting pot of the world, we got the most popular names from hundreds of countries, so unusual, uncommon, or unique names became popular.

Having a special name became a thing in America and so we began coming up with even more distinctive names, like my name Scott. A hundred years ago no one had the first name Scott. My dad, born in 1918, was named Scott after his mom's maiden name. He was teased as a kid about having a last name as a first name – he hated his name when he was younger.

Anyway, in a culture where there are very few names, they use descriptors and nicknames to distinguish between people with the same name – that's how last names came to be. We were still in the habit of doing that 100 years ago in America. There was Harry the Hat and Harry the Lip, Bugsy Malone, Fats Domino, Chubby Checker, Slim Pickens, Blackjack Pershing, Baby Face Nelson, Butch Cassidy, and Billy the Kid. The most famous of all is of course Jesus Christ.

Well, Joe was specified by His Tribe, Levi, by His home, Cyprus, but mostly by his nickname Barnabas. In Hebrew בַּר (bär), means son and נְבִיא (nä-vē) means

prophet, so bär-nä-vē, Barnabas, is the son of a prophet. The meaning could be that his dad or ancestor was a prophet. The context would favor the idea that Joseph himself was a prophet, perhaps from a line of prophets.

Well, Luke translated the Hebrew nickname into Greek for us and we have it here as the “Son of Encouragement.” Some translations go with “Son of Comfort,” or “Help,” or “Consolation,” but most of them with “Son of Encouragement.” They’re all okay, the problem arises because Biblical encouragement doesn’t mean what we think it means.

The Greek translation of the Hebrew is actually παράκλησις (pä-rä-klā-sēs). If that sounds familiar to you it is because we transliterate the word into English and call Jesus, the Paraclete, and the Holy Spirit, the “Other Paraclete.” What is a paraclete? Technically, it is your attorney.

If you’ve ever had your rights read to you for real, you can confirm that it is a sobering event. When you’re in trouble with the law, your best friend on the planet is your attorney. He will teach you, comfort you, help you, and will honestly inform and exhort you. Exhort means

to push you to do what's right – preaching is exhortation. Preaching is the teacher of the Gospel pushing you to put the message into practice. It is to encourage you to take appropriate action.

Biblical encouragement is exhortation. It is to encourage others to act on what they know, which is precisely what the prophets did. Barnabas was a preacher of the Gospel. By Biblical fact we know he was the leader of the Apostolic team with Paul initially. We know that with Paul and separate from Paul he founded numerous churches. We know that even he was temporarily “carried away by the hypocrisy” of Peter and some Jewish Christians in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-14). By church tradition he was one of the 70 that Jesus sent out to preach and was a co-author of the Bible Book Hebrews.

The very best encouragement you can possibly get is someone exhorting you to obey God. Barnabas was from a very wealthy Levite family living on the island of Cyprus. He likely moved to Jerusalem as a youth to study under Gamaliel where he met his fellow student Saul, who became the Apostle Paul.



Acts 5:1–11, 1But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2and kept back some of the proceeds for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles’ feet. 3But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the proceeds of the land? 4While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.” 5And as he heard these words, Ananias collapsed and died; and great fear came over all who heard about it. 6The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. 7Now an interval of about three hours elapsed, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8And Peter responded to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for this price?” And she said, “Yes, for that price.” 9Then Peter said to her, “Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry

you out as well.” 10And immediately she collapsed at his feet and died; and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard about these things.

As I said it doesn't take long for self to ruin community. In order for lies to work there must be some truth in them – a successful lie is really a distortion of the truth. When truth is distorted, it still seems true, but it isn't and the line between the two grows fuzzy. A single lie can topple far more truth than we can imagine. It's like a speck of yeast getting into a pure batch of dough... before long, it will have turned the entire thing into something else.

Truth is a tiny light that shines into a sea of darkness. Lies are the darkness enveloping and overshadowing the light. The reason the church is called Alêtheia is because I have seen firsthand what lies can do to Christianity. Allowed to go unchecked lies can change it enough that it isn't Christianity anymore at all. God wasn't ready for that in Jerusalem.

As I also said giving to the church is ultimately giving to God. Within Biblical Christianity what you give is always a matter of the heart and is always between you and God as it is a gift from you to Him given to His representatives in the church.

The correct way to think about it is to realize that 100 percent of everything that you have and that you are belongs fully to God. The question is never what of yours will you give to Him, but rather, what of His will you keep for yourself.

At this stage in the church there was a complete understanding of what I just said. Everyone was a free autonomous agent choosing to be part of the church family and as such everyone was completely free to give or not give in accordance with their Holy Spirit informed conscience.

No one pushed Ananias and Sapphira to do what they did. The property was theirs and even if they had promised the proceeds to the church once it had sold, the reality is that the money was still theirs. They could have changed their mind and not given anything, or they could have said we only want to give a portion of the sale price. That was their prerogative, their right.

Here's the Truth though... Whether anyone put any pressure on them, they felt pressure. After Barnabas and others did what they did anyone who was likewise well off would feel pressure to follow suit. Humanness takes over and self will not be denied.

This couple liked being part of the fledgling community for one reason or another. They did not feel like being as generous as they wanted others to believe that they were. What was one little white lie? The problem is this is the very root of what destroys unity.

Deception, mischaracterization, falsehood, lies. It creates distrust which breeds disunity, and the Holy Spirit was not putting up with any of it at this point. Both liars instantly died. The example, for the church, was dramatic and because of that unity prevailed for a little while longer.

Not only was God making a point, God was also protecting the unity in the church that was necessary to get Christianity off the ground. As time went on, He allowed people to be people and we can clearly see the consequences over the last 20 centuries.

What are we to take away from all of this besides getting an interesting historical story, grappling with the idea that God killed a married couple, and better understanding why the Christian church is a complete mess?

We are given principles here that are as relevant today as they were then. God has shown us how the early church was unified because they put God's agenda of building His Kingdom first and foremost. The Kingdom of Heaven built on earth by Jesus through His disciples as they – as we – allow the Holy Spirit to proclaim His glorious Name through us.

We can also easily glean that our materialism, our focus on self-interest, and our every man for himself mentality is antichristian – is in opposition to His purpose and our unity in that purpose.

Finally, we can grasp that when it comes to what we're doing here in the church... How we participate, how we interact, how we think, is what we're really doing to God Himself. Jesus is the church.

Let us focus on Kingdom business instead of fleshly business, let us concentrate on eternal wealth rather

than temporal wealth. Let us be found busy advancing His agenda as a unified group of Believers choosing to love.