

Heart-level Unity

The passage we are looking at today makes clear that the heart you and I bring to church matters. It matters because God sees and cares about our hearts. We will see this in how Luke describes a threat to the unity of the early church and in how God responds. The church in Jerusalem was large and yet they had incredible unity. Acts 4:4 says they were of “one heart and soul.” And when two people entered in and had a different heart, God dealt with them in order to protect the unity of the church. As we look at this passage today, let’s allow God to show us anything in our hearts that might threaten our unity and hinder what God wants to do in and through Faith.

Read Acts 4:32-5:16

1. How is the community of believers described (4:32-37)? What kind of unity were they experiencing? What kinds of things were happening out of their unity?
2. As you consider the story of Ananias and Sapphira, what does Luke first share about Barnabas (vv. 36-37)? What seems to be true of his heart?
3. Ananias and Sapphira’s actions seem much like Barnabas’ and yet they sinned. What exactly was the nature of their sin?
4. Was God’s judgment extreme in how he dealt with their sin? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think it is that people today who seek to deceive fellow church members and God don’t meet the same dramatic end?

6. After describing how heart-level unity was preserved in the church, how does Luke describe the influence that those inside the church had on those outside the church (5:12-16)?

Steve said:

This passage stresses that **God is zealous about heart-level unity in the church.** If God is zealous about something we should be too. If it really is true that “how you treat the church is how you treat God,” you and I should walk in the fear of the Lord and consider carefully how we conduct ourselves in the church (and in the larger body of Christ).

7. What do you think about the idea that how we treat the church is how we treat God?

Steve said:

Consider two complementary implications. **First**, avoid thoughts, words, and actions that compromise the unity within the church. . .**Second**, promote heart-level unity within the church. Like the church in Jerusalem, let’s seek to be of “one heart and soul.” And like them, let’s pursue a type of unity that is expressed in generosity.

8. Are there any thoughts, words, or actions that you need to avoid that are compromising unity at Faith?
9. Is there any that you need to do to promote heart-level unity at Faith?

Bonus question: Below is one of the giving liturgies that we often use at the end of a worship service. In what way is the heart of this liturgy reflected in the generosity that we see in the early church in Acts 4:32-37?

Holy Father, there is nothing I have that You have not given me. All I have and am belong to You, bought with the blood of Jesus. To spend everything on myself, and to give without sacrifice, is the way of the world that You cannot abide. But generosity is the way of those who call Christ their Lord; who love Him with free hearts and serve Him with renewed minds. Who withstand the delusion of riches that chokes the Word; whose hearts are in Your kingdom and not in the systems of the world. I am determined to increase in generosity until it can be said that there is no needy person among us. I am determined to be trustworthy with such a little thing as money that You may trust me with true riches. Above all, I am determined to be generous because You, Father, are generous. It is the delight of Your daughters and sons to share Your traits, and to show what You are like to all the world. Amen.