

We saw last week, that having their congregational prayer answered in v31, the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness. Verses 32-37, are a digression of Luke, to describe other activities of the early church in this time. They not only preached the word of God with boldness, but they loved one another also.

- I. Unity (v32a)
- II. Charity (vv32b, 34-37)
- III. Testimony (v33)

I. Unity (v32a)

1. V32—"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul"—the terms "heart" and "soul" are similar in meaning.
2. When Scripture uses them together as Luke does in this text, there's a subtle but important difference between them.
3. By "heart" is largely meant the affections, whereas by "soul" is meant the mind or will—the purposes.
4. Taken together these two terms, heart and soul, refer to our feeling, thinking, and willing—they refer to the whole soul.
5. Luke says, "the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul"—they were closely unified.
6. They shared feeling, thinking, and willing—they had a common heart and a common soul—they were one.
7. Now, beginning with the fourth century, the church described itself with four attributes (we typically think of attributes with respect to God).
8. But it's also right to apply various attributes to the church; in fact, in the enlarged Nicene Creed of 381 spoke of 4 attributes—"We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church."
9. Notice, the first of these four attributes is unity or oneness—there's only one true church and not many churches.
10. Now, this of course doesn't deny there are many local churches, scattered throughout the entire earth.
11. But these are all expressions or extensions of a single church, and that single church, is one or unified.
12. And so, before I point out a few things about this unity, let me first of all remind you of who was unified.
13. If we were to go back to chapter 2, we would find that no fewer than 15 different nations were present at Pentecost.
14. This means, that this multitude were from a diversity of regions, nations, and cultures—they were very different.
15. And yet, we find that they "were of one heart and one soul"—they had a common heart and a common soul.
16. Brethren, this is supernatural—it's the work of the Spirit—it's beyond the natural ability of mere men.
17. John Calvin—"It is a wondrous thing to see a large assembly of people in agreement, more wondrous than two or three men who might enjoy mutual friendship. It is possible they can agree. It is an obvious miracle when a large multitude lives in peace. The Spirit of God had to have His hand in it."

18. And so, let us examine two things about this unity: the nature of true unity and the need for true unity.
19. (1) Its nature—here I want to clarify in what way they were "of one heart and one soul"—what were they unified in?
20. (a) They were unified in love—by this I mean, they fundamentally loved and cherished the same things.
21. Every Christian loves the Triune God, the Holy Scriptures, the Lord's Day, and the Lord's people—in short, they love God and all that uniquely belongs to Him.
22. Phil.2:2—"Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."
23. "Having the same love"—that is, the same love for God, Scripture, the Lord's Day, and the Lord's people.
24. Brethren, we understand that Scripture makes very clear, if we truly love God, we will love each other.
25. These people were of one heart and one soul—they had a common and genuine love for one another.
26. Thomas Manton—"Brotherly love, is such an affection as knits the hearts of Christians to one another, as if they had but one heart and one soul in common among them."
27. (b) They were unified in beliefs—by this I mean, they fundamentally believed the same theological truths.
28. They believe what the Bible says about God, man, sin, Christ, salvation, the church, heaven, and hell.
29. Brethren, all Christians agree on these things—there's no debate about these things among God's people.
30. Thus, Paul says in Ephesians 4:5, there's "one faith," and then in v13, he speaks about "the unity of the faith."
31. There is only "one faith" that has been handed down to the church—to believe, defend, and proclaim.
32. Now, this doesn't mean that we are going to see eye-to-eye on every specific text and every specific doctrine.
33. But it does mean this—we will be unified in our general understanding of the broad teachings of Scripture.
34. (c) They were unified in purposes—by this I mean, they fundamentally had the same goals and purposes.
35. In all that they did, they lived for the glory of God—this was the ultimate aim or goal of all their lives.
36. They didn't live for themselves—they didn't seek to promote their own agenda or the agenda of a small sect.
37. No, they were willing to put away personal preferences and opinions that failed to create true peace and unity.
38. (2) Its need—here I want to remind you of a necessary distinction between positional and practical unity.
39. (a) Positional unity—by this I refers to a unity that is certain and actual—all true Christians have unity.
40. And the reason is obvious—we are all indwelt with the same Spirit and have in Christ, the same Head.
41. Thus, in this sense, Christianity unity is a certainty—we have a common love, a common faith, and a common goal.

42. And brethren you know this—let's say you're at the store or at the park and you meet another Christian.
43. And you begin talking about the struggles of life, the glorious of the gospel, and the hope of eternal life.
44. Well, while you may differ on many issues, and some of them are rather important, there's basic unity.
45. Why? Because you are indwelt with the very same Spirit as they are, and you both have a common Head.
46. (b) Practical unity—by this I refer to a unity that needs to be fostered, maintained, preserved, and increased.
47. Eph.4:1-6—" I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all."
48. Notice, Paul roots his exhortation for practical unity (vv1-3), in the reality of a positional unity (vv4-6).

II. Charity (vv32b, 34-37)

1. By "charity" I refer to a practical love that exists between Christians, as they care for each other needs.
2. V32b—"neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common."
3. (1) Charity is loving—by this I mean, it's an expression of the unity all believers have in Jesus Christ.
4. V32—"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common."
5. Why did they have "all things in common" but because, they had a common heart and soul; a common love.
6. (2) Charity is practical—by this I mean, it assists others with the practical and mundane things of life.
7. (3) Charity is voluntary—by this I mean, it gives freely and willingly, not from a forced or pressured necessity.
8. Thus, I don't believe this passage teaches, that every Christian has to sell all their belongs and give them to the church.
9. We have to remember something I said when we started our exposition of Acts, that is, it's the Acts of the Apostles.
10. This means, the book describes the events that took place within the Apostolic age; which was a unique age.
11. The Apostles were unique—they were men who personally witnessed the ministry, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.
12. Thus, they served as mouthpieces of Christ, speaking the word of God with authority and without error.
13. Furthermore, they were given the ability to perform signs and wonders to vindicate their divine commission.
14. Thus, under Peter's first sermon 3,000 people were saved, and then under his second sermon thousands more were saved.

15. Acts 4:4—"However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."
16. If the men numbered "about five thousand," then it's conceivable to assume, the number of members was doubt that.
17. Furthermore, if you remember, many of these new converted were not from Jerusalem, but were there for Pentecost.
18. Thus, there was a very serious and yet unique need, and those who had the ability, rose to the occasion.
19. All charity that is acceptable to God is given freely and willingly, without pressure or outward force.
20. Verses 34-35—"Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need."
21. Having sold their lands and houses, these early Christians "laid the proceeds at the feet of the apostles."
22. And according to v35, it was the responsibility of the apostles to distribute to each as anyone had need.
23. Now, as we are going to see in the beginning of chapter 6, the start of a NC office called the deaconate.
24. And it would be the responsibility of this office, to serve the physical and temporal needs of the brethren.
25. But here's my question—Why did these early Christians give the proceeds to the apostles to distribute to each as anyone had need?
26. Well, I trust the answer is obvious—because there were too many people to know of individual needs.
27. This simply underscores the uniqueness of this situation—thousands of needy people added to the church.
28. Thus, it's not possible to turn to this passage in support of some mandatory communal living or communism.
29. MLJ—"The Christian community of Acts was the antithesis of communism. Communism imposes an equality. In the early church there was a voluntary equality and a rejoicing in that. Nothing was done in a spirit of fear because the secret police were watching and you had no choice. It was the exact opposite of some imposed system."
30. But, having clarified these things, let us not overlook the obvious—this was a unified and charitable people.
31. Within vv36-37, we have an example of this gracious benevolence in the specific case of Joses (or Barnabas).
32. Now, I know it may be tempting, to overlook verses 36-37—as we will see next week, I believe they are in part a contrast to Ananias and Sapphira.
33. But I want to suggest, this man named Joses (or possibly Joseph), is more than a mere contrast to Ananias and Sapphira.
34. As many of you know, this man, will be a very important co-laborer with Paul, through the second half of Acts.
35. Luke is simply introducing him here as a faithful member of the church, with a charitable and gracious heart.
36. (a) His name, v36—"And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement)."
37. Because the name Joses, or Joseph, was a common name, the apostles eventually give him the nickname Barnabas.

38. The nickname Barnabas translated means "Son of Encouragement"—this seemingly described his character.
39. He was a "son of encouragement"—he was especially suited to give encouragement to those around him.
40. (b) His country, v36—"a Levite of the country of Cyprus"—that is, he was a Jew who lived in Cyprus.
41. He was a Jew who grew up away from Jerusalem—he was a part of what's called the Jews of the Dispersion.
42. Levites, if you remember, were to labor in the temple, but they were not given any land within Canaan.
43. Thus, the fact that Barnabas was a Jew who lived within a Greek context, made him a perfect helper for Paul (who was especially sent to the Gentiles).
44. (c) His actions, v37—"having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostle's feet"—where and when he obtained land isn't clear.
45. Seemingly, he came to Jerusalem from Cyprus to celebrate Pentecost—was he already a Christian, or was he converted under one of Peter two sermons?
46. To own land was not only a sign of wealth, but also dignity and status; thus, he not only gave up land, but also social standing.
47. David Peterson—"Although only a field was sold, ownership of land was the principal source of wealth and social standing in the Greco-Roman world. Barnabas thus embodies the ideal of the 'servant-benefactor,' well known in that culture. When he humbly places the proceeds at the apostle's feet, he forgoes the usual social benefit of praise and public honor. In effect, his donation is a private contribution to the common purse. With this narrative, Luke encourages others with wealth and status in the church to cross social barriers and benefit those in need."

III. Testimony (v33)

1. V33—"And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all."
2. (1) What they did—"the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus"—remember, they were personal witnesses.
3. A necessary qualification of being an apostle was that you witnessed the actual bodily resurrected Christ.
4. Thus, the witness the apostles were able to give to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was a personal witness.
5. Now, the apostles understood the resurrection as a validation or vindication of all that Christ said and did.
6. If Christ was raised from the dead (as He said He would), then all that He said was true—He was who He said He was.
7. Thus, by giving witness to the resurrection, it's not that the apostle's never mentioned anything but the resurrection.
8. No, they mentioned everything else in relation to the resurrection—they gave witness to who He was and what He did.
9. (2) How they did it—here I am thinking of the beginning and end of the verse—"And with great power" "and great grace was upon them all."
10. In other words, the reason they were able to bear witness of Christ with great power was because great grace was upon them.
11. The source of their power was the grace of God, as communicated to them through the Spirit's ministry.

12. Acts 1:8—"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
13. And so, in closing, I want to briefly discuss the relationship between their unity, charity, and testimony.
14. Or, let me restate the question this way—In what ways are unity and charity related to the effectiveness of witness (let me suggest three ways).
15. (a) Unified prayer is heard, v24—"So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said."
16. That means, they came before God with one voice—they came before God with one heart and one soul.
17. Brethren, it's really impossible to overstate the power that God gives to His unified and needy people.
18. For example, let's say you have 5 young children, and let's say that one of them had a very serious need (this would move your heart to help them).
19. But what if all 5 of them had a very serious need, and all 5 of them came to you at once (how much more would this move your heart to help them).
20. Brethren, remember that when our Savior taught us to pray, the prayer He gave us was filled with plural pronouns.
21. Matt.6:9-12—"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."
22. (b) Unified charity is blessed—that is, when the church is unified and loving, it knows the blessing of God.
23. Wherever there's true unity, there's also the blessing of God bestowed and enjoyed in a number of ways.
24. Ps.133:1-3—"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! For there the LORD commanded the blessing – Life forevermore."
25. For the Lord to command the blessing, means the Lord promised the blessing—but notice where He promised it—"where brethren dwell together in unity."
26. 2Cor.13:11—"Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you."
27. This first says the same thing as Psalm 133—it promises the blessing of God upon a loving and unified people.
28. (c) Unified witness is powerful—by this I mean, it's a powerful testimony to the lost world around us.
29. Rom.15:5-6—"Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be likeminded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."
30. Christian unity honors and glorifies God—a unified church is a worshipping and thankful church that brings glory to God.
31. Conversely, a divided church is a dishonoring church—it's unable to praise God with one voice, to serve God with one heart.
32. Jn.17:20-21—"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."
33. Our Savior prays for both a positional and practical unity—positional (that they all may be one – not only the apostles but those who will believe); practical (that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me).

34. You see, this practical unity is evident and manifest, whereas positional unity is spiritual and unseeable (John Owen – 'Christ prays for such a oneness as may convince the world—that the world may see that they are one, and so believe that God had sent Him').