

Unity and The Fear Of God

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[0 : 00] So it has been a few weeks since we have journeyed into the book of Acts together.

This accounting of the early church given to us by the great historian Luke allows us to see the priorities of the apostles and early church believers as they went about meeting and doing ministry together.

The emphasis up to this point has been on the bold declaration of the gospel and the care of the church for its own people. Today we're going to jump back into Acts and we're going to look at chapters 4 and 5, shockingly, and discuss the unity of the church and the fear of God in the church.

And I hope to get through both points, but if not, I am not going to rush through this topic just to let you know, Mr. Wilson. So let's start in Acts 4 and we'll read verses 32 through 37 as we look at the church united.

Acts 4 verse 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.

[1 : 36] And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 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 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Digging into this passage a bit, we see the phrase full number. Now the full number of those who believed. This causes us to reflect on the fact that the church in Jerusalem had grown to massive proportions in a short amount of time.

By way of reminder of what we have already seen in the book of Acts, on the day of Pentecost, about 3,000 people believed and became part of the church in Acts 2, verse 41.

After the day of Pentecost, we're told in Acts 2, 47, that there were people being saved day by day. And by the time Peter is arrested for preaching in Solomon's portico, at the beginning of chapter 4, it says the number of the men came to be about 5,000, the number of the men who had believed.

[3 : 20] Now it's not fully clear if this means 5,000 in addition to the original 3,000, or if it was including the 3,000. Either way, the Lord was clearly working in the hearts of the people.

The apostles were faithfully preaching the gospel message. The Holy Spirit was convicting the lives of the hearts of those who were listening and hearing, and men and women were being saved.

And as these sinners were confessing their sins and coming together to worship their Holy Redeemer, we see that they were of one heart and soul.

They were of one heart and soul. To sum it up in a word, they were united. The church had unity. And you think about it, sinners convicted of their sin came together at the cross of Christ seeking God's mercy and grace.

And from the level ground, at the base of the cross, they could see one another's weakness and the need to care for each other. This is the very thing that the apostle Paul desired from the church in Ephesus.

[4 : 35] He wanted unity. He encouraged them to pursue unity. In Ephesians 4, verses 1 through 6, Paul writes, I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

It's a very huge emphasis by Paul. And I wonder if maybe part of his admonition to the church at Ephesus comes from what he saw as a persecutor of the church in the days as we're going to get to Acts 7-8 and we see Saul, who will become Paul, enter the picture.

But either way, unity is what is expected by God for his people, for his church. It is what Paul preached. It is what was taking place in the book of Acts.

And the church in Jerusalem exemplified the unity of the Spirit by the way they took care of each other. You check again in verse 32. It says that they had everything in common.

And then verse 34 says, there was not a needy person among them. Those are quite, both of those are pretty interesting phrases.

[6 : 16] They had everything in common and there was not a needy person among their number. 5,000 at least. No need. Or at least no need that wasn't being met by those within the congregation.

Now I'm going to pause for a second in case you've got your red flags of going up and you're wondering if I'm trying to raise a red flag of communism. That's not what we're getting at. I'm going to get to a further explanation here in a second.

So I just wanted you to recognize what was happening in the church in Jerusalem with so many people. And placed between those two phrases in verse 32 and verse 33 is the engine which was powering the church with unity.

The grace of God realized through the gospel of Jesus. Notice 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.

What was being preached was the gospel message. It wasn't just something that was taken out on street evangelism and sharing with people how to be saved and how to know Jesus Christ as your Savior and then that's that and we never talk about it again.

[7 : 32] We talk about everything else in the Bible. No, no. The very essence of preaching and teaching in the church must be the gospel message.

It must be Jesus Christ crucified and risen again for the forgiveness of sin. Martin Lloyd-Jones says, it is the gospel alone that will produce unity.

And that's true. All these people from all walks of life, some of them coming from foreign lands to Jerusalem to worship at the temple before being converted, they are all brought together under the banner of Christ in the gospel message.

And any perceived privilege or superiority over others melts away under the grace of God and they develop a genuine burden for one another.

It is only the work of the Lord in the life of an individual that leads to genuine, genuine concern and care for others.

[8 : 41] I direct you to Ezekiel 11 verses 19 and 20 on the screen where God's speaking of his people. He says, and I will give them one heart and a new spirit I will put within them.

I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them.

And they shall be my people and I will be their God. This is the very thing that happens in the life of an individual when they submit themselves to the Lordship of Christ.

They call on him for salvation. God does a work in that he replaces the heart of stone with a heart of flesh that we may walk in his statutes and keep and obey his law, his rule and commandments.

The sharing of material blessings among the believers in Acts, it's not a prescription in its presentation. The church is not supposed to be selling their land or houses or possessions.

[9 : 51] So I don't want you to, so if you were starting to feel maybe a little guilty or a little convicted, don't. You don't need to go sell your houses and your property to go and meet the needs here. All right?

But what was happening with the sharing of blessings among the believers in Jerusalem is it was a sign of the grace of God at work in that community.

The common factor is a generous spirit providing appropriate care for the needs of others in the church. They were doing what they could with what they had to help their brothers and sisters out.

And it seems like there may have been a bunch of landlords in there. And they said, hey, I would really like to get out from having to keep this property anyway. Let's sell it.

And let's help others out who have need. And that's such an amazing thing that's taking place. It's such, it really is sacrifice when you consider how important in the hearts and minds of people money is.

[10 : 54] John MacArthur says of this passage, he says, frankly, they were too busy loving each other, too busy sharing with each other, too busy preaching the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ to waste time with selfish pursuits or bickering or idle talk or gossip or backbiting or criticism or divisiveness or self-will, self-gratification, self-glory.

They really didn't have any time for their own things. They were so focused on loving one another that it wasn't about them.

They weren't thinking of themselves. I know several people that would fall under that category that it's not about them, the way they live their life, the way they go about their business.

It's always about other people. It's always about what is going to best benefit another individual. What is it that they need that I can give them? It may be money.

It may be time. It may be advice, solicited advice. It could be a number of things that we can grant and give to somebody else.

[12 : 13] It may be land. It may be a house. I don't know. But the fact is that there are people and we ought to also have this type of mindset of willing and ready to serve and to help and be willing to sacrifice for the benefit of others.

As I mentioned in verse 33, we see that the apostles, they're preaching the gospel. And it's at the very core of the gospel that selflessness exists.

Selflessness, not selfishness. When you think about the gospel, God so loved the world that he gave his only son. Selfless.

John 10, verse 15, Jesus said, I lay down my life for the sheep. Selfless. God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Selfless. I've always been amazed at Romans 5, 8. While we were still sinners, while we were still shaking our fist in the face of God, he sent Jesus to die for us.

[13 : 45] Still in rebellion, hateful towards God. God. And it plays out in the gospel itself as Jesus is going to the cross and leading up to that.

He was beaten. He was whipped. He was spit upon. His beard was ripped out. And then ultimately, he suffered on the cross. And he did it for us. He knew what was to come.

And that's why in the Garden of Gethsemane, he said he was sweating, basically droplets of blood. He was under so much stress and agony in anticipation of what was yet to come. Because humanly speaking, he didn't want to endure that.

Let's be honest. Who does? Nobody wants to be whipped and beaten, their flesh ripped from their body. Nobody wants to suffocate to death on a cross in front of hundreds of people.

But what does Jesus do? He's sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. He's in agony. And he's praying, he's praying, God, Lord, Father, take this cup, let it pass.

[15 : 04] But not my will, but yours be done. He knew what was to come, didn't want to, humanly dealing with that struggle.

I don't want to do this, but if it's your will, I'll do it. Fully submitted. Selfless act of love by Jesus for us.

Everything, everything about the gospel of Jesus is others-mindedness. When the gospel is the most important and prominent teaching in the church, then the hearts of the people will be turned to one another.

The focus is no longer on me, but on you. And when the hearts of the people are turned to one another, then there is unity in spirit and a building up of the church.

And Barnabas is named as an example. He'll become a prominent church leader later in Acts, in Acts 13, when he and Paul are sent out from Antioch.

[16 : 08] So he wasn't just a landlord with a lot of money who was giving a lot of that to the church. He was a spiritually concerned individual for the souls of men and women to know Jesus.

And he was one that was, I don't want to say lifted up as if he's to be praised, but he is being honored, certainly by Luke, by even this mention. That he sold a field, belonged to him and brought the money and laid at the apostles' feet.

He's an example of what was taking place. He wasn't the only one. This was happening throughout the church with lots of individuals.

That's the unity of the church. That's what it looks like. It's sacrifice. It's care and concern and love. It's being willing to take a phone call when you've just gotten off the phone with four other people beforehand and you're just done.

Or to respond to another text message or respond to another email or make a drive over to somebody's house. to be willing to sit with people in their grief, to be willing to help people in their need.

[17 : 34] Maybe they're, I don't know. I'm horrible. I mentioned this the other day to somebody I was talking to. I'm horrible with coming up with illustrations on the spot. It's my biggest weakness as a teacher.

I don't know how teachers do it. But I'm just thinking like, maybe you are, I'm going to take Josh for an example. Josh is, he's got some carpentry skills.

He kind of knows what to do and such. So he takes that opportunity to go to Sekedani, frequent flyer, to go over and help out.

Now I mean, by trade, he's a Wi-Fi guy. But, he has other skills as well which he can lend a hand.

And it's not just there, he's been at my house fixing things. He and Eric have plumbed pipes and all that stuff. Thank you guys. I really appreciate you.

[18 : 33] It may be coming again soon. No, I'm just kidding. But, but that's the thing. It's like, it doesn't have to be what your trade is. It could be just something that you can do and help out with and you do it.

I am not a carpenter. But I go because I can be a laborer. I can work. I can do what you tell me to do. Right, for the most part.

So, but that's what we need to, we need to have is that sacrificial, willing to give our time. Maybe it's our resources. Maybe it's our money. Maybe it's just our skill. Maybe it's our ear.

Whatever it is to care for one another. The fear of God. So, this may seem like two different sermons, but I really feel like this all really goes together mainly because I don't believe there should be a chapter break here because with Ananias and Sapphira, it's a contrast to Barnabas.

Let's read Acts 5 verses 1 through 11. So, you got Barnabas, you got the church, they're caring for one another, they're loving one another, they're selling property, they're meeting each other's needs.

[19 : 51] Acts 5, 1, but a man named Ananias, notice that but, that contrast, but a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property.

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.

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?

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. When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.

[20 : 58] The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours, his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

And Peter said to her, Tell me whether you sold the land for so much? And she said, Yes, for so much. 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. 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. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

By the grace of God, we have been forgiven and brought near to him through Jesus. Ephesians 2.5 says that even when we were dead in our trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ.

[22 : 04] By grace, you have been saved. But we must not allow our benefit from the grace of God to cause us to forget an appropriate fear of God.

Jeremiah 32, verse 39, along the lines of being born again and having this new heart. God says, I will give them one heart in one way that they may fear me forever for their own good and the good of their children after them.

That's interesting. He's giving us a new heart and a way to live so that we may fear him forever. the example given to us in Acts 5 of Ananias and Sapphira shows what happens when another fear other than the fear of God rules our lives.

I believe it's possible. I have no reason to believe otherwise that Ananias and Sapphira are probably believers. Why were they there otherwise? Right?

So they probably believed in Jesus and they were part of the 5,000. And we know that in that group the people were caring for one another through the selling of possessions and they're bringing the proceeds to the apostles to be distributed as people have need.

[23 : 37] And Ananias and Sapphira they saw the recognition that people like Barnabas were receiving and they desired it for themselves. There's no other explanation.

upon the sale of some property they presented some of the proceeds to the apostles as saying this is the entirety of the sale.

This is all that I could get for this land. And they put it at their feet. See the sin is not that they didn't give it all.

It's not that so that's what I'm saying this is not a communism passage by any stretch. Their sin is not that they didn't give it all because God never asked for it.

They could have kept it and they didn't have to sell it. The sin ultimately is twofold. First is that they lied about the amount of money being the entirety of the sale.

[24 : 35] They lied to the apostles before God to the Holy Spirit. And the second part is that they were hypocrites.

As they were presenting themselves as honest caring people when they were indeed deceitful. When they were looking for recognition. When they were looking to have their names penned by Luke but in a different way.

Not as those who would die at the apostles feet but as those who would be honored like oh look here's Barnabas with his sale and oh here's Ananias and Sapphira and what they're bringing.

the expectation by God for his people is that they would fear him forever. The term fear I'm thinking of Jeremiah I'm still in Jeremiah 32 oh yeah it's still out there good.

The term fear literally means to be afraid to be frightened. It's the same term used in Exodus chapter 14 verse 10 where it says that the people feared greatly when they saw Pharaoh and his men approaching them by the Red Sea.

[25 : 48] It's a trembling fear. Now this understanding of the fear of God is contrary to what many people of Baptist churches have heard taught over the years.

If you're like me more times than not preachers tend to land on the definition of reverence for the kind of fear we ought to have for God. And then they proceed to drown out even that definition with more emphasis of grace and love.

Perhaps unintentionally we've developed a culture in the church so focused on the grace and love of God that we have forgotten that these attributes are so awesome because of the holiness and justice of God.

You must take God in his entirety and his entire character. You can't piecemeal. You can't divide him up and parse him out and say okay well he's a God of love and a God of peace and a God of comfort and a God of grace and a God of mercy and all this.

And this is the God we present to people but we forget to mention that oh all this is good stuff because he's also a God of holiness. He's a holy God.

[26 : 58] He's a just God. He's a judge of all mankind. And he is going to punish and condemn those who have offended and broken his law and expectation.

Don't forget this part of him. This is all God. Right? This is all him. This is all his character. And all of this the grace and the love and the mercy looks so great and awesome because of the holiness and the justice part of him.

Turn to Isaiah chapter 6. Isaiah chapter 6 verses 1 through 7. Isaiah 6.1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Above him stood the seraphim. each had six wings. With two he covered his face and with two he covered his feet and with two he flew. And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called and the house was filled with smoke.

[28 : 25] And I said, Woe is me for I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Then one of the seraphim flew to me having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said, Behold, this has touched your lips.

Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for. Notice the seraphim do not proclaim loving, loving, loving or gracious, gracious, gracious.

They proclaim holy, holy, holy. And in that moment of recognition of his own sinfulness before a holy God, the grace of God is extended to Isaiah.

But not before that. Isaiah recognized what he was seeing. He sees the Lord, the King, the Lord of hosts.

[29 : 39] And he says, Woe is me. I am a sinner. I am undone. I am going to be dead. This is not good. Because he recognized he's a sinner and that is a holy God and it doesn't end well for him.

But it was his recognition and his admission of that that ultimately the grace and mercy of God would be extended toward him. But not before that.

Oswald Chambers says, The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else.

Whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else. The statement by Chambers bears out in the America that we see today.

The battle for the souls of men has become even more evident against the backdrop of darkness of the LGBTQ agenda. people are people are playing God and determining what is right in their own minds.

[30 : 46] And many so-called churches have kowtowed to the LGBTQ agenda of self-love and affirmation placing the fear of man head and shoulders above the fear of God.

And in the name of love and grace Christians are compromising the truth of scripture for the sake of friendships and not offending others. hypocritically Christians are proclaiming the truth of God concerning LGBTQ but then going to their friends social media accounts and supporting their perverse lifestyle.

Otherwise they're calling themselves Christians but claiming that the Bible is wrong in its condemnation of such lifestyles. One way or another the fear of God is being minimized or is non-existent in the lives of professing believers.

William Gurnall an Anglican preacher of many years ago says we fear men so much because we fear God so little.

Quickly forgotten are the words of the apostle Peter 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 17 when he says for it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God and if it begins with us what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

[32 : 06] Ladies and gentlemen we will be judged by God. Peter is very clear in this. It starts with us. Paul identifies this reality in his second letter to the church at Corinth 2 Corinthians 5 verses 9 and 10 memorize these verses if you haven't already.

So whether we are at home or away we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body whether good or evil.

But I thought we were saved from judgment. You are from eternal judgment and eternal separation from God. Your sins are forgiven but you still will give an account of the life that you live with the knowledge and revelation that you have.

And since we are going to stand before Christ to give an account for the lives that we lived here on earth let us lead let us heed the advice given by Paul in his letter to the Philippians.

Philippians 2 verses 12 and 13 therefore my beloved as you have always obeyed so now not only as in my presence but much more in my absence work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

[33 : 35] We are to work out our salvation not like you know we work to gain it right I mean it's working out it's what some people do and other people wish they could do you know it's working out it's getting in shape it's it's honing the salvation it's called we would refer to it as sanctification work out your salvation with fear and trembling know what God says know the God that you serve know the God that you go to in prayer know what he commands and expects of you and seek to live it out and work it out and you know what sinner you're not going to be perfect in doing it and that's why we have a God who desires us to come to him and confess our sins who is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness that's why we have a high priest who always intercedes on our behalf before the father because we are sinners because we do fall short and because we are not perfect yet so work out your own salvation with fear and trembling and have a healthy fear of

God in your life because you will stand before him and give an account of yourself your words your deeds your jokes your thoughts and if you're in Christ praise God because it'll only be honestly I really don't know what it'll ultimately be but it'll only be a momentary moment of feeling of disappointment and shame before our savior but then we enter into glory forever and not into eternal condemnation but test yourself to see if you're in the faith if you pass the test if you are in Christ because if you're not then it doesn't stop for you and it will continue on let's pray father I thank you for this time in your word lord you have challenged me in this area lord I

I confess lord my sin of taking lightly who you are in my life not having a true fear and tremble before you lord we are in your hands we will the day will come when we stand before you as believers and give an account of our lives and lord we are very concerned for many people we know loved ones who don't know you loved ones who have strayed very far from the way and the truth and the life and lord we desire to see them back but help us lord not to compromise lord help us not to turn from you or compromise your word or be or be willing to accept lies and affirm lies to the peril of others lord i pray that we would take seriously the opportunity that you've given us that you do give us to honor you with our lives with our words with our actions help us to please you in all we do move for to■■ introduces me to come Poe

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