

One Heart, One Mind

Մէկ Սիրտ, Մէկ Հոգի

Acts 4:32-37; 5:1-11

These days we are facing earthquake which hits Turkey and Syria. 7.8 righter is not a small number. It shook the earth and brought disaster. More than 40,000 people died. In this tragedy, I see people blaming God for this tragedy. Before blaming God, let me remind you that because of human sin, we live in a cursed world, where sickness, earthquakes, hurricanes exist. As long as we live on this earth, we will face those natural tragedies.

Yet, let me add how human sinfulness, and selfishness added the tragedy of the earthquake. Many of those lives would not have been lost if humans were not **liars and cheaters**. So many engineers who built those homes cheated and lied on the government inspectors; they build bad homes, and did not put the right kind of material. The result? the tragedy of collapsing all these buildings; those are criminals.

This morning we will see how **the early church** faced people who were **lying**. **Hypocrisy** is a sickness in the society, and it does help to have **one body and one soul**. In fact, it destroys the body.

From the beginning of our story, in Genesis, the best example is when Satan lied to humans: **“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” ... You will not certainly die,” ... you will be like God.**” Genesis 3
Liar... liar and liar...

What did lying do? It killed, it destroyed...

Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden. We live in a world where death is part of our existence.

Why do I start with this tragic story?

The early church was not perfect. In fact, don't search for any perfect church. The passage that we will read has very **positive and very negative** examples. Hypocrisy in the church is a terrible disease.

Jesus rebuked so many times the Pharisees and used the phrase: **“You hypocrites...”**

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. (Mat 23:23 NIV)

Let’s examine our passages and find out how Luke gives us two illustrations. First, he will describe **the new community**, the **covenant community** and one name—a positive one (**Barnabas**) and then two negative ones (**Ananias and Sapphira**).

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (Acts 4:32-35 NIV11)

We see this topic occurs again: **the new community of love and care.** It occurred in chapter 2. **“they devoted themselves...to the fellowship”** (Acts 2:42) (*koinonia*). *Koinonia* means **“common”**. This same commitment continues in the early church.

Luke says: **All the believers were one in heart and mind** (soul).

“‘Being of one heart and soul’ in this passage seems to me not just ‘agreeing on all disputed matters’ but also ‘ready to regard each other’s need as one’s own.’”¹

Let us remember that this new community, the new church, is a **Jewish community** who accepted Christ as their Savior. They knew how to be the **“covenant community”** of God from the Old Testament. Their new teacher (rabbi) is Jesus of Nazareth.

In the Old Testament “in the book of Deuteronomy, which speaks of what life will be like when God finally establishes his people. And in Deuteronomy we find chapter 15, which gives commands for how, every seven years, there must be a **remission of debts**: everyone who is owed money must remit the claim.

However, the passage goes on (verse 4), ‘there will be no needy person among

you, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”²

So here it is the **new Christian family**, the **true covenant community**, that God had always intended to set up. Jesus of Nazareth is the head of this community.

-What happened here: **the forgiveness of sins**, the debt of sin was paid by Jesus Christ himself on the cross.

-But this community expressed their debt forgiveness (not every seven years), no, by **sharing their property**, share it in common.

-I mentioned this before. This is not a lesson on communism, socialism, or even capitalism.

This was the style of life in the early church. They did have their own homes and properties as well. But they had also one box of collection, sold their properties and gave it to the disciples and used it according to the need.

Isn't this wonderful community?

It is a lesson to us as church, as individuals, to learn from their **generosity**.

- First, that we all need Jesus; we are sinners and need to be forgiven from our sins (the blood of Jesus Christ), and as we see in the early church, they expressed their joy in sharing with each other.

- Second, it was not an artificial or imposed sharing.

They were united **in one heart and one spirit** (soul). How else one can express generously the joy of what God granted us in the first place?

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's (mega) grace was so powerfully at work in them all ...

God's mega GRACE at work in them.

Do you experience God's MEGA GRACE in your life?

We would like to hold on to things instead of saying, "I can share this..."

The truth is that nothing belongs to us.

"God loves a cheerful giver" says the Bible. (1 Cor 9:7)

RC Sproul says: "God is pleased when our giving is a response of incredible gratitude for the good and perfect gifts we have received from him. Everything we have comes from his hand, so how could we possibly be anything but cheerful givers?"³

Luke continues with two examples, and he gives the names of specific people

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

Now a man named **Ananias**, together with his wife **Sapphira**, also sold a piece of property. ² With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.

³ Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”

⁵ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶ Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. (Acts 4:36-37; 5:1-6 NIV11)

I wanted to read both examples together.

Let me start with the negative example. Ananias, and later his wife Sapphira.

Let me assure you that I have preached for many years, and no one died because of my message!

Yet, it seems this is very harsh punishment; God gives time to repent...

Let us clarify some facts.

1. No one forced them to sell their land.
2. If they wanted to keep some of the money with them, that was acceptable.
3. Satan works in their lives, because Satan is the expert to teach us how to lie.

The issue is hypocrisy and lying. How can we appear good givers.

“They lied to the church. They lied to God. They lied to the Holy Spirit. They pretended that they were giving the full amount when they were not. Giving gifts to God is sacred business, and to taint a gift to the Lord by concealing it in the package of a lie is a kind of blasphemy against the sanctity of God.”⁴

This is not a joke. It is a serious thing to lie and steal from God.

Leviticus 10, two sons of Aaron were wicked and thieves, they died in the sanctuary.

In Joshua 7, there man called Achan, who took things that should devoted to the Lord. Judgment came on this man....

Sin is dangerous fire. Don't play with fire. It will burn you...

-NT Wright says we can't have it both ways:

“If you want to be a community of the living God, you mustn't be surprised if the living God takes you seriously, seriously enough to make it clear that there is no such thing as cheap grace. If you invoke the power of the holy one, the one who will eventually right all wrongs and sort out all cheating and lying, he may just decide to do some of that work already, in advance. God is not mocked.”⁵

Luke also gives a positive example, Joseph, nicknamed Barnabas, which means the son of encouragement. “This nickname was given by the apostles. Most likely he sold his land in Cyprus and laid the money at the apostles' feet. It was an act of liberality fully in keeping with his character as it later emerges in the Acts narrative. Luke deliberately introduces him here.”⁶

Application:

1. Ask yourself today, what destroys the unity of the body?

Lying kills.

It kills relationship, community.

Do you live a deceitful life? Which areas in your life you have not surrender to Jesus.

Jesus knew that it is not easy to be one. He prayed to His father that the body will be one. **“Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.”** (John 17:11)

2. Are you a cheerful giver?

Tithing (giving 10%) is biblical giving, we learned from the OT. But the NT teaches us to move further from the tithe. Everything belongs to God. Don't stop after your 10%. The rest of your income belongs to God, too. Spend it wisely. If there is a need, step in and help.

Prayer: Jesus prayed: “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their (disciples) message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. (John 17:20,21a NIV11)

Here is my prayer based on Paul’s prayer to the church of Ephesians

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
(Ephesians 3;14-19 NIV11)

1. N.T. Wright *Acts For Everyone*, P 77
2. N. T. Wright *Acts For Everyone*, p75
3. R.C. Sproul, *You Will be My Witnesses to the End of the Earth*, Acts. P 86
4. R.C. Sproul, *You Will be My Witnesses to the End of the Earth*, Acts. P 87
5. N.T. Wright *Acts For Everyone*, P 80
6. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts, The Spirit, the Church & the World*, P 108