

The ONE Virtue of Christian Community

Acts 4:32-35

MPS The grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ produces a people united in His fellowship and mission in the world.

OBJ Every person can understand how spiritual unity blesses God's people by Three Evidences of God's grace.

INTRO When you think about the church, what do you think is the most important characteristic that marks the church?

READ Acts 4:32-35

*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. ³³And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴There 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 ³⁵and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. **Acts 4:32-35***

Two similar, parallel passages in Acts describe the "community" of the early church. The first is found in Acts 2:42-47 where immediately following the day of Pentecost and Peter preaching, more than 3,000 people became followers of Jesus Christ. Acts 2 identifies the primary characteristic of the people as a devotion to the Apostles teaching and fellowship, as well as the breaking of bread and prayers. When we come to Acts 4 the initial momentum continued, as if there were no struggles or challenges. But that is not the case at all. The Jewish rulers has grown increasingly frustrated by the Jesus movement and had were intensifying their threat and persecution. And the response of the believers to the threats and persecution was not to cower and shrink back, but to pray for greater boldness. **Who are these people, that when faced with opposition bent on stopping them, it strengthened them; they grew more united in fellowship, demonstrated greater gladness and joy among themselves, and experienced a more powerful impact in their mission?**

TRANS A simple answer to this is that they were a people living in spiritual unity by God's grace. Significant challenges were a daily reality, threat of persecution for their faith intensified, and even problems within the church appeared. But even in all of these, they continued in the grace of God by the gospel. LifePoint has enjoyed a strong season of ministry in our church over the last six months. There are many and much that is "new" among us. This is so exciting for us. And at the same time presents a high challenge to us as we labor for unity, *together* you will hear us say. **This passage proves important for LifePoint today because it reveals the one virtue that God most desires to characterize us as His people today.**

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"Now the full number of those who believed" reminds us of the recent growth explosion at Pentecost. Luke includes every person who believed in his record here. Surely there were people among the early church who regularly attended worship and community gatherings that did not exhibit all the characteristics he will mention. But of all who believed, Luke tells us there was distinct evidence that marked their life. **When grace is at work, it distinctively marks a people in spiritual unity by God's grace and for God's purposes in the world.**

OBJ Luke provides **Three Evidences when Oneness (spiritual unity) becomes the highest virtue of the church.**

1. **Surrendered Focus: "one heart and soul"**

"Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul," .32a

The first evidence of God's grace that produced spiritual unity was that the people *"were of one heart and soul"*. The combination used here points to the totality of a person. *"Heart"* refers to the center of a person in their conscious reality, mind, affection, and will, in how they lived, and not simply the emotion or feelings. *"Soul"* refers to the inner part of a person, which most fully describes the part of who we are that directly relates to God. By combining these two, Luke refers to the whole person. But of even greater magnitude, Luke says that this is true of the whole assembly. **When God's grace is at work, it marks every person who believes by a oneness in spiritual unity.**



Allow me to ask: **How well does this phrase describe how you think about church? Would you say that you have this kind of spiritual unity with the church? Would you that you desire this kind of spiritual unity with the church? What we CAN say is that God calls all who believe in Jesus, all who claim to be Christian, who are true Christ-followers, to spiritual unity by a self-denial in following Him that produces a self-identification with His people.**

APPL This first evidence obliterates the individualized, self-centered focus of so much spiritual chatter today. And, this phrase also obliterates the most prevalent, hyper-commercialized expression of church today that is centered in “sit and take it in” over “engage and serve”.

Spiritual unity does not produce the loss of self, but produces the readiness of self-denial for others. Luke says *“the full of those who believed were of one heart and soul”*. **Is the grace of God marking your life so that you are fully united with His people?** This is not simply agreement, but identification with. **You know you are together in spiritual unity with the church when you identify with God’s people for your own spiritual health.**

TRANS To spiritual unity Luke immediately adds a second evidence of God’s grace.

2. Sacrificial generosity: “they had everything in common”

“and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.” .32b

As much as many people love the idea of the first evidence, even if they do not experience it, even more want little to do with this evidence. As I heard one pastor quip: “People get funny when you talk about money.” Luke records that for all who believed, who were true followers of Jesus Christ, the grace of God that saved them produced a sacrificial generosity in them. They were not coerced nor manipulated. Their generosity was produced by a change of heart from God. And the change was not merely to do good that’s so easily found and celebrated everywhere today. Luke describes a people who were marked by generosity such that they were not only generous in their giving, but ready to sacrifice too. Grace stops one from defaulting to self-interests and opens our hearts, eyes, and ears to the interest of others. **Grace transforms a person from greediness to gratitude that produces a desire for generosity.**

The grace of God at work in our heart means that we would not just come to community to take more ‘for our possession’, but rather to be ready to offer our possessions to make sure that no need went un-met. **Grace shows us that Jesus gave up everything of himself for us, and beckons of us, “how, then, could anything of ours not be given up for him.”**

Now to be clear, this is not a Biblical foundation nor argument for some type of socialism nor communism, nor even a communal asceticism of pooling of funds. No one had anything taken from them. They gave it willingly. And no one gave up all they had to live off the “common pool” of funds. Rather, what Luke describes is that people were so strongly united that they did not consider self-interest as of greater value than the needs of others. Selflessness is at the center of sacrifice, when someone ceases to and refuses to think of self so that they can think of others. They were so “together” with one another that there was nothing in their life that was not used to minister and bless others. Luke says *“they had everything in common”*. **Is the grace of God marking your life so that you are sacrificially investing for the advancement of His mission through His people?** This is not simply agreement, but investment of one’s whole life. **You know you are together in spiritual unity with the church when you are invested in the people with your whole life.**

TRANS The third evidence of oneness was not only what was taking place among them, but what was going out from them.

3. Supernatural Presence: “great power...great grace”

“And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴There 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 ³⁵and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.” .33-35

The apostles’ testimony comprises what would later become the New Testament today, as they explained all things in light of Jesus’ resurrection. So, the great power Luke mentions here was in the preaching and teaching of the church. And when the unity of the church produced more powerful impact in preaching, great grace rested on all people. **Do you realize what Luke is saying?** The oneness of the church made the preaching more potent so that great grace was more evident among all people. This doesn’t mean the apostles were “better preachers” or “preached better” because of it, though unity surely



produces better preaching. But it does mean that the preaching had a more potent impact in people's lives because of the unity of the people. *When the church is united, every person is more powerfully impacted by the preaching of God's Word.*

How could unity make this kind of difference? What demonstrates grace on a person's life more than anything else? You could say, "when they think correctly about God." Correct thinking about God is surely a demonstration of grace. You could even say, "when they thought correctly about themselves." Grace surely leads us to understand our lives not with self at the center but with Jesus as Lord because of what He has done for us. But the greatest evidence that makes obvious how deeply and strongly grace has taken hold of a person's life is that because of what they have come to know of Jesus Christ, they think of others before themselves in all matters at all times. So, when God is moving powerfully among one who is in Oneness with the whole, the whole is more greatly impacted. That's the unmistakable greatness of grace! *There is great power from Jesus Christ in the church that is together in oneness of heart and mind.*

Luke says the apostles preached with "*great power*" and "*great grace*" was upon all. *Is the grace of God marking your life so that you are freely testifying among His people of all that Jesus is doing, to call others to follow Him?* This is not simple listening in' to conversations in silent agreement, but intentionally sharing with other of all that Jesus is doing in your life. *You know you are together in spiritual unity with the church when you are intentionally sharing how Jesus has changed you and is leading you to reach other people, and you are deeply moved by seeing God work in the life of others.*

What is the One great virtue of the church? Oneness among the church — together in Jesus Christ for the sake of the gospel – is THE great virtue of the church.

The grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ produces a people united in His fellowship and mission in the world.

CLOSE Today is a great day and opportunity to labor toward spiritual unity. That is the whole purpose in our design and planning for this day.

