

Acts 4:32-35 “Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common. <sup>33</sup> With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on all of them. <sup>34</sup> For there was not a needy person among them because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of what was sold, <sup>35</sup> and laid them at the apostles' feet. This was then distributed to each person as any had need.”

5:13-14 No one else dared to join them, but the people spoke well of them. <sup>14</sup> Believers were added to the Lord in increasing numbers—multitudes of both men and women.

## Introduction

We're in Acts 5 looking mainly at the story of Ananias and Saphira today. What do we make of this story?

**Have you ever had a conversation with someone about our church who didn't know that you attend our church?** What did they say? What's the word on the street?

Maybe they perceived us to be just too hard core with the Bible preaching?

That church that sponsors the occasional big event in town—Christmas, Easter, or a friendly conversation between Christians and Mormons.

Maybe they generally view our church with suspicion because of the many high profile scandals they've heard of in the News.

Or maybe everyone knows us as “the nice church.” *Make no mistake about it—every church has a reputation; good, bad, or somewhere in between.*

**Transition:** Before us today is a passage that tells us why the church was so esteemed by the community in Judea. Why they were held in such regard.

*It also tells us a story—about schemers who could have caused great scandal; and about God's swift judgment of it to maintain the reputation of this fledgling church.*

**Today we'll look the marks of an esteemed church.**

**1. One in heart and mind.** A group of people who have decided to be unoffendable in contentious matters.

Acts 4:32 “Now the entire group of those who believed were of **one heart and mind**”

**What does it mean for us to be of one heart?** I think Paul's answer to that is in his letter to the Corinthians. **Paul says that the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.**

1 Cor 13:4–8 Paul defines what that Christian virtue of love should look like.

<sup>4</sup> **Love is patient** (it is relentless/longsuffering)

**love is kind** (caring and thoughtful)

**Love does not envy** (seethe in jealousy over what others have)

**is not boastful, is not arrogant** (refuses to strut its stuff)

<sup>5</sup> **is not rude, is not self-seeking** (aggressive; blundering into the business of others)

**is not irritable** (cranky—love cures us of terminal grouchiness)

**and does not keep a record of wrongs** (refuses to keep a running file on other people—tallying the sins of others; filing them to use them later when the opportunity arises).

<sup>6</sup> **Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth** (they don't revel in the failure of rivals; spiking the football when another Christian brother or sister fails)

<sup>7</sup> **It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things** (puts up with a lot; gives other people the benefit of the doubt; hopes for better news).

<sup>8</sup> **Love never ends.** (and because it is all of this—love is that one enduring quality of the Christian church)

**This is the heart of the church.** This is the virtue that characterize the one heart of the people of God.

**So what does it mean to be of one mind?**

Eph 4:4–6 “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—<sup>5</sup> **one Lord, one faith, one baptism,**  
<sup>6</sup> **one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”**

We are to have the mind of Christ, united in those essential matters of the faith that make us one. Charitable in those debatable matters which aren't the unifying issues of the faiths. **John 17:23 “so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me.”**

## The second mark of an esteemed church...

**2. Contagious generosity.** A church filled with the Spirit will be led by the Spirit to give generously to the needs of the Gospel and its ministry. <sup>34</sup> All the needs of the church community were met through voluntary giving, bringing the proceeds of land sold to the apostles' feet.

### Principles of Generosity

**Culture: This was a strong-group culture whereas you and I have a weak-group culture.** Our culture encourages and enables us toward independence, their culture was marked by interdependence. Our society encourages us to live for the good of self.

- **Tithing (giving a 10<sup>th</sup>) is an Old Testament standard.**
  - **NT affirms that believers are no longer under the “yoke” of the law.** And tithing was part of an Old Testament legal standard for Israel. Mt 23 does not bind the Christian conscience to tithing. It is Torah legislation that was for those under the Mosaic covenant. Peter said in Acts 15:10 that Mosaic legislation was an unbearable yoke to carry so better not bind it on the gentile Christians. Paul said the purpose of the law was to reveal God's holy standard and the fact that we've sinned against it (Rom 3:20; 5:20). Christians are therefore no longer under the legal mandates of Mosaic law (Rom 6:14) having been delivered from it (Rom 7:1-6). Paul calls the law a “ministry of death” (2 Cor 3:7), that it was “fading away” (2 Cor 3:11). The law cannot justify (Gal 2:16) and so Christians are “dead to the law” (Gal 2:19). The Christian is forbidden to go back to the Mosaic law (Gal 3:1).
  - **There is no tradition-trajectory of tithing in the NT church.** Tithing is not a law or a requirement though it may very well be wise standard of giving.
- **NT giving is a “spirit of cheerful generosity.”** Paul told the Corinthians “God loves a cheerful giver.” “give as you've decided”
- **NT giving is not compulsory.** Not a tax to fund a bureaucracy but a voluntary gift from the heart. If God has to pry an offering out of our clinched white knuckles—he doesn't even want it. He wants a heart that is filled with the generous Spirit of God.
- **NT giving is sacrificial.** Often, we do see that the NT standard of giving in fact exceeds the OT standard.

**Illus. I have to take a few minutes and highlight the generosity of this church. Just a few examples:**

In 2019 you gave \$8,000 towards marriage team training and 1500\$ in scholarships to couples to help marriages in this church.

In 2020—you gave \$15,700 to missionaries who are furthering the work of Christ in the world.

In 2020—you gave \$53,000 to the mercy fund—which we use to meet people's material needs in benevolence ministry.

**Video: Ririe Chapel thank you video. (2 min). Video from Pastor James Petersen**

### The third mark of an esteemed church...

**3. The Fear of God.** 5:1-11 “But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property. <sup>2</sup> However, he kept back part of the proceeds with his wife’s knowledge, and brought a portion of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet. <sup>3</sup> “Ananias,” Peter asked, “why has **Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit** and keep back part of the proceeds of the land? <sup>4</sup> Wasn’t it yours while you possessed it? And after it was sold, wasn’t it at your disposal? Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart? **You have not lied to people but to God.**” <sup>5</sup> When he heard these words, Ananias dropped dead, and a great fear came on all who heard. <sup>6</sup> The young men got up, wrapped his body, carried him out, and buried him.

Three hours later, Sapphira comes in and the same thing happens to her. Look at verse 11 “**Then great fear came on the whole church and on all who heard these things.**”

**Culture: This was an honor, shame culture.** Public reputation (how one was perceived by community) was everything. Sometimes Jews adopted the value system of Romans—where lying, cheating, stealing, deceiving to bring yourself public honor was encouraged.

- **Ananias and Sapphira: They are fakers and false believers (Satan has filled their hearts).** They weasel their way into the church seeking honor for themselves. How do they do it? Through public benefaction. They too sold some land and it looks like the problem here is that they told everyone that they got a lower price for the land than they had. And then kept the difference for themselves.
- **Why kill them?** Because this kind of deception and selfish honor-seeking, taking the honor and glory away from Christ—if tolerated would do enormous harm to the church.
- **Result? The result is that everyone fears the Lord (vv.5, 11).** The church fears God and so does the community. So that people dare not join the church with false motives. With selfish aims to exploit the people of God and their spirit of generosity.

**We should live with a holy fear; a sanctified sense of panic—that is especially true for how we treat fellow believers.**

**Illus. Ravi Zacharias, who recently passed away from sudden brain cancer.** He was a well-known preacher and apologist for the Christian faith. Eloquent, affable, entertaining and appeared to love the gospel. After he passed his ministry received enough complaints that they conducted an independent investigation on allegations of sexual misconduct. The report issued and then Published by RZIM was absolutely devastating. The report made it clear that we were dealing with a person whose private sin and unwillingness to repent and seek help—did untold damage to many. **A preacher by day, a sexual predator by night. Paul described this in Rom 3 as a person “in whom there is no fear of God at all” (Rom 3:18).**

**The church is to be with one heart of love, one mind in the gospel, permeated by generosity; living in the fear of Almighty God.**

### The fourth mark of an esteemed church...

**4. Power of the Spirit.** 5:12-13, 15-16 “Many signs and wonders were being done among the people through the hands of the apostles. They were all together in Solomon’s Colonnade. <sup>13</sup> **No one else dared to join them, but the people spoke well of them.** <sup>15</sup> As a result, they would carry the sick out into the streets and lay them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them. <sup>16</sup> In addition, a multitude came together from the towns surrounding Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.”

**Culture: Signs and wonders and miracles.** These folks had a Supernaturalist worldview. Jews believed there was a distinction between the natural and supernatural realms. And they very much believed that the spiritual realm was real and could intervene in the lives of God’s people.

- **God still does miracles. He still heals bodies, provides for our finances, brings us job opportunities,** gives us spiritual comfort, fills us with boldness to share the word. God still does the supernatural. And you and I, of all people, should embrace that worldview. Having said that
- **I think the ability to perform miracles at will—what theologians call “legislative miracle working power”** only applied to Jesus, the 12, and first century apostles who had the gift of performing miracles. Why? Because again, we don’t see a traditional-trajectory in the NT in early Christian practice (2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries)—of pastors, overseers, bishops or ordinary church folk operating in this apostolic mode. Legislating a miracle seems to be the prerogative of apostolic ministry.
- **But I believe God still performs miracles.** I pray for them all the time. And I am challenged not to pray waffling prayers either. We love medicinal cures. Chemo saved my wife’s life. Voice therapy saved my mental health.

Christ Community Church is a spirit-filled, spirit-led church.

**Illus. My favorite miracle of Jesus is when he gathered up some mud and rubbed that slimy concoction in the eyes of a blind man.**

He used a rabbinic medicinal aid. And in doing so he was demonstrating that sometimes God does miracles in partnership with the resources we have on hand. God works through stuff.

## The fifth mark of an esteemed church...

**5. Healthy church growth.** 5:14 “believers were added to the Lord in increasing numbers—multitudes of both men and women.”

**There are people that we don't want here. People who aren't welcome.** Anyone who would seek to exploit the church, do harm to the body, or intentionally cause division in our ranks due to controversial issues that take our attention and focus away from the Good news of Jesus.

### What is healthy church growth?

- **Healthy churches grow.** I looked up how often the NT used the metaphor of growing things, like bodies and gardens. It's a lot. The parable of the talents—the message is that faithfulness *is fruitfulness*. Healthy children grow and reach their full potential. A mark of health is appropriate growth. Size, strength, and ability. There is no limit to potential of the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Come one, come all! There's room in Christ's household for you.
- **Healthy churches grow—but not all growing churches are healthy.** Every human body has a built-in ceiling to its own growth potential. Beyond that, the body can actually become unhealthy.  
**There is a TV show called “My 600 pound Life”**—I watched episode and it was very sad to see people who, after they grew up, they just kept growing out. They couldn't leave their bedrooms.  
**Growth? Yes. Health? No.** Every church has a built-in ceiling to their numerical growth. Once that limit is reached and surpassed it can experience an unhealthy, kind of flabby growth that isn't good for it.
- **Healthy churches seek to grow in deep and wide.** Adding new members daily to their numbers? Yes, of course. We want sinners to become saints. We want unbelievers and irreligious to believe in Jesus and experience his life-transforming power. But whatever sheep, whatever saints God has brought us—God has entrusted to us—we want to be faithful to fulfill the other half of the great commission. **To teach them to obey all that Christ has commanded. To grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Healthy churches don't pit numerical vs. spiritual growth. They have a vision for both.**
- **Healthy churches can experience needed pruning.** A healthy body can go through a season of decline in order to make room for new growth and new vision. One of Jesus's favorite images of God was as a vine-dresser. Who prunes back the vine in order to make room for the new things that God is bringing forth.
- **Healthy churches break bread and baptize new believers.**

## **Application**

1. **Let's become unoffendable. Not easily triggered by matters of preference.** And we choose to be of one heart (love) and one mind (the Gospel).
2. **Let's allow our example of generosity to go viral.** Let's continue to inspire others to be radical givers to God and his Gospel.
3. **Let's be reminded of the fear of the Lord.** We chose not to live double lives, using the church rather than belonging to the church.
4. **Let's rely, through prayer, on God's empowering presence.** You and I can't do anything of consequence on our own. We are wholly reliant on his provision and his empowering presence.
5. **Let's continue to make disciples who gather to worship, grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, and go out into the world to proclaim his grace and truth.**