

Introduction:

1. I am always impressed when I read the book of Acts about the growth of the early church.
 - a. No one can deny that the church grew rapidly and grew to be large, Acts 2:41, 4:4, 5:14, etc. These verses are but a sampling of how the church grew. There are many more.
 - b. I recently had a conversation with an elder in another church. He asked about the size of our congregation and was shocked to learn that we had about 400 members. He immediately concluded that it was a bad thing to have that many Christians together—because you can't personally know everyone well in a group that large. I reminded him that we are a small congregation when compared to the Jerusalem church (3,000+ members on the first day). He was stunned by that comment. I don't think he had ever thought about a church of 400 being a comparatively small congregation. He didn't know what to say.
 - c. Does the Jerusalem church also stun us? Would you have liked to have been in that church? Would you think it was a bad thing for that many Christians to belong to one another? That is what I want to emphasize—that they did belong to one another.
2. We might think a group that large would have been distant, cold and indifferent to one another. But that is not the case at all. In fact, there was a genuine closeness that existed, Acts 4:32. They were of "one heart and one soul." This text emphasizes the remarkable unity that existed in that local church. It must be our goal to achieve and maintain that same kind of unity. We are one!

The Lesson:**I. What are the benefits of being of one heart and one soul?**

- A. Unity promotes successful evangelism.
 1. You can't convert the lost if you spend all your time being divided, fighting one another.
 2. The gospel grew rapidly in the early church because they were united, Acts 4:33. The apostles focused on teaching Jesus to the lost, not dealing with squabbles in the church.
- B. Unity helps us in caring for needy saints.
 1. People of one heart care about one another and care what happens to each other.
 2. They made sure that no one among them was lacking, Acts 4:32-35.
- C. Unity furthers edification among us (the building up of one another).
 1. Edification is designed to build us up to be more like Christ—and to have his heart.
 2. When we have that heart, we want to help one another grow in faith; we seek to have peace with one another. And when peace is found, edification follows, Acts 9:31.
- D. Unity helps us keep new babes in Christ.
 1. The sense of unity that is involved found among those with one heart envelops and enfolds new converts and welcomes them as part of the family of God.
 2. Special efforts were made by early Christians to ground converts and to give them the same oneness of heart that others had, Acts 11:23.
- E. Unity is critical in our staying together and avoiding division.
 1. So many churches find themselves embroiled in bitter rivalries, power struggles and division. On the Judgment Day men will give account for such ugly things.
 2. Those who are of one heart, however, do not allow disagreements to divide them. The Jerusalem church would not allow a complaint to divide them, Acts 6:1ff. They addressed the problem and solved it. God did not expect saints to go to another congregation!
- F. The most important element: Unity greatly pleases our God in heaven.
 1. God is displeased when brethren are mean-spirited, talking ugly and dividing the church.
 2. God's grace—His favor—was upon those brethren who were of one heart and one soul, Acts 4:32-33. See what God says about brethren who work in unity, Psalms 133:1.
- G. To summarize: There was a loving and caring union that existed among the early saints.
 1. They felt alike, they belonged to one another. Their lives and dreams for eternity were attached to the same things. Being of one heart preserved them from division and factions.
 2. Their unity was seen in every possible way—in their conduct and disposition, in their prayers and in all of their worship, in their working together for the good of the kingdom.
 3. What was found in those early Christians must also be found in us. We have the same faith they had. We can have the same heart. We don't have to be inferior to them.

II. How did they accomplish this remarkable unity?

- A. They truly believed in Jesus as Lord and Christ, Acts 2:36.
 1. They were not bound together by tradition, heritage, social status or economic status. They were bound together by their belief in a person—Jesus Christ.
 2. People who don't have much conviction about Jesus don't care much about unity. If a church divides or if brethren just get mad at one another and part ways, who cares? Jesus cares! Does our belief in Jesus bind us together? Is it strong enough to keep us together no matter what the devil throws at us?
- B. They were unselfish in all of their activities, Acts 4:32.
 1. Their unselfish spirit was demonstrated in their sharing of their goods. Many of these brethren were incredibly poor and some had lost everything because of their faith in Jesus. Some lost their homes, others lost their jobs, and others were cast out of their families. The need was great—and so was the response of the early Christians as they generously gave to assist the needy saints. They were not selfish with respect to their goods.
 2. The problem of selfishness can be manifested in a number of ways. If a brother had said, "These things are mine, and I will share with no one," we would say he was selfish. What about a brother who says, "Things have to be done my way, or I won't be part of the church," is that not also selfish? Illustration: A church was moving three miles from its present location. One family lived across the street from the current location. All they had to do was walk across the street and they were at worship. The father said that if the church moved, then he was taking his family to another congregation. He had all sorts of objections why the church should not move, but the real reason was that he would lose his convenient situation. This was a selfish man. Add to that, the fact that he was a big contributor; he tried to hold the church hostage by the double threat of withholding his contribution and then leaving if he did not get his way! This is a selfish man. He was a "my way or the highway" kind of guy. That won't work in families or in the church.
 3. People who are unselfish recognize that they will not always get their way in the local church. The question is: what is good for the congregation as a whole, and what is good for the cause of Jesus? It is not a question of what do I want?
- C. They kept the Holy Spirit's plan for unity, Ephesians 4:1-3.
 1. Maintaining one heart and one soul *requires effort*. It is work. It does not come easily. Paul did not make a mistake when he used the word "endeavoring." The NIV says, "Make every effort..." We cannot take the attitude that says, "If it happens, fine. If not, fine." We have to care. We have to make it happen.
 2. We must have an *intense desire* for unity in accordance with God's plan. Unity by any other means is a sham and a farce.
 3. We must have an *intense sense of responsibility* for one another, to edify and support, seeking one another's well-being. Only when Christians have high regard for one another can they be of one heart and soul! *We have to care* about others—the weak, new converts, those going astray, the sick and hurting! Caring about others means sacrifice on my part. I must give time; I must give of self. I must give my will!
 4. Most of all (returning to our point above), we must have a *heart for Jesus Christ*. Our relationship with one another is not about maintaining a system; it's not about a mere institution that happens to be called "church." It is about our relationship with God. And having a relationship with God, we then have a working relationship with one another. Without a heart for God, we have nothing to bind us together. Let us continue to confess that we have a heart for Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Acts 8:37. We will have one heart to the degree that we have a heart for Christ.
- D. These early Christians were united. What worked among our brethren 2,000 years ago will also work today. But Christians today have to work to make it happen.

Conclusion:

1. The future of this church and the work we are doing together depends on us being of one heart and one soul. We must face the future with the determination that we are God's people and that we have a great work to do for our God. We must let nothing divide us or destroy us. We are one!
2. Have you confessed faith in Jesus as God's Son? Continue to confess Him in your life! Have a heart for Jesus and for His people—the church. Have a heart for the lost!