

One Heart and Soul

The events surrounding the healing of the lame man at the Temple in Jerusalem caused many to believe in Jesus as the Christ and to obey the commands to repent and be baptized. And as Luke continues the description of the growth of the church, he includes a very informative statement that is exemplified many times as the gospel spreads. *"And the congregation of those who believed **were of one heart and soul**; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them"* (Acts 4:32). The linking words, "were of one heart and soul" highlights the fact that they did not just think about the unity among them but worked in harmony with and for each other. What the mind believed was put into practice and accomplished by the living individual.

The apostles continued to teach the resurrection of Jesus, the salvation through the living Christ, and the love and grace of God became evident in the actions of the believers. There is no indication of riches among the people but only a common sharing of possessions and necessities to sustain life as they continued to listen and learn from the apostles. The time was one of preparation to carry the word throughout the community, surrounding lands, and into the world. Just as God's grace was freely given to all, so the possessions of each were made available to everyone. *"For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need"* (Acts 4:34-35).

Could it be that this was also preparing for their departure soon after the death of Stephen? One individual at least seems to be divesting himself of property near Jerusalem to spend his life spreading the gospel. He was one of the first to preach in distant lands. *"Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet"* (Acts 4:36-37). It is reminiscent of Elisha, who sacrificed the oxen that pulled his plow and used the yokes, harness, and plow for the fire to boil them so that he could devote himself to God's service (1 Kings 19:19-21).

Acts chapter 5, however, begins with a couple that sought the praise of men more than the comfort they could bring to others. Ananias and his wife Sapphira, *"sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet"* (Acts 5:1-2). The implication is that they said the contribution was the full price, as others had done. But the Spirit through Peter knew different. Peter said, *"Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? ... You have not lied to men but to God."* (Acts 5:3-4).

The final prophecy of the Old Testament contains a lesson for those who would promise one thing to the Lord but deliver something else. *"But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King," says the LORD of hosts, "and My name is feared among the nations"* (Malachi 1:14). To say or imply a gift to God then conspire to change or shorten the gift makes the participants in the conspiracy, each a "swindler and a thief." And just like Achan and all his family were killed because they stole from God at Jericho (Joshua 7:24), Ananias and his wife died because they stole and lied to God about it (Acts 5:5-10).

Just as great fear came over the people after Achan's death, "Great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things (Acts 5:11). Two incidents, one as the Israelites began their new life in the promised land, and the other as Christians started their new life in the church, The Kingdom of Christ, demonstrated how serious the faithful service to God is. As the apostles continued to teach the new converts on the Temple porch, they were not bothered by those who refused to hear. Many came to them from the countryside to be healed and hear the word (Acts 5:12-16). Today, we need to be reminded of our duty to keep promises and respect our obligation to God.

God has given us life. In the physical world, we have this assurance, "*It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment* " (Hebrews 9:27). Man cannot break that contract. When we are born into a new life leading to eternal life, we enter a contract with God to live according to the instructions of His Son. We owe Him everything. Do we withhold anything: money, time, effort, prayers, or anything else?

Are we robbing God?