

13. The Church Served One Another in Love

In our last topic, we saw how the leaders of the early church responded when Peter and John were threatened and told not to speak any more in the name of Jesus. The leaders of the early church responded by praying and asking the Lord to give them boldness to speak the Word of God. In the same way, we want to show our physical and spiritual children the importance of praying and asking the Lord to give us His strength to speak His Word with boldness. In our topic today, we are going to see that the believers in the early church were also learning how to serve one another in love.

In our last topic, we saw that the believers were all in one accord as they prayed and asked the Lord to give them strength to speak the Word of God with boldness. This oneness of the early believers was also shown in other ways. Acts 4:32-33 says, “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.” Here, we read that the multitude of believers were all of one heart and one soul.

The word translated “heart” is used to speak of the fact that the physical heart is the most important organ for physical life. It also came to mean the inner man from which sin comes. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” In fact, the heart is often used to describe the human spirit. Acts 15:8-9 says, “So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.” Just as the heart is the source of sin, we see that when the Holy Spirit comes into our human spirit at the moment of salvation the Holy Spirit purifies our hearts. Instead of being controlled by our sin nature, we are now given a new nature that has a desire to please God. We see in the early church that those who believed were of one heart.

We also see that those who believed were of one soul. The fact that both the heart and the soul are mentioned in this verse shows that they are separate. The soul is the mind, emotions and will. When Christians are of one heart, we see that it affects every area of our lives. Romans 15:5-6 says, “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here, we see that when our hearts are in unity with the Lord our thoughts and actions will be controlled by our heart. We will have the same concern for others that we have for ourselves and it will cause us to give glory to God with our words and deeds.

Because the early believers were of one heart and one soul, we see that the believers were sharing with one another. Here, we see that the love of Christ caused these early believers to have a different view of their possessions. They were glad for opportunities to minister to the needs of one another. Acts 2:44-45 says, “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” Here, we see that this sharing was continuing. Since new believers had stayed in Jerusalem to

learn more about Christ, the other believers shared to help meet their physical needs.

This sharing caused the teaching of the apostles about the resurrection of Christ to have great power. Other Jews saw the changed attitudes and actions of the new believers and realized that the message of the resurrection had changed and transformed the lives of these new believers. Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” When people see the transformed lives of new Christians, those lifestyle changes cause people to realize that the message of the resurrection had great power to change and transform lives. These believers were also experiencing the grace of God in their lives.

The actions produced by these attitudes are seen in the next verses. Acts 4:34-35 says, “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.” This unity in heart and soul caused the believers to take action. They shared what they had with others so that no one lacked. The word translated “lacked” means *to be needy or without food or clothing*. People were sharing what they had to meet the needs of others.

We read that the people that had land or houses began to sell their land or their houses to provide money to meet the needs of those who lacked. Here, we see that the believers that had extra pieces of property or extra houses that they did not need sold these extra things so that they could help share in the needs of the needy Christians. When the leaders of the church at Jerusalem gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and Paul, Galatians 2:10 says, “*They desired* only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.” Here, we see that the concern of the leaders in Jerusalem to share in the needs of the needy was something that they encouraged Paul and Barnabas to practice in their lives and ministry.

Paul later passed this same concern to other Christians. In Acts 20:35, he told the leaders of the church at Ephesus, “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”” Paul had demonstrated this principle to the leaders at Ephesus by his own example. Paul also told the Christians in Corinth in 2 Corinthians 8:9, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” Then he wrote a little later in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, “But this *I say*: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. *So let* each one *give* as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” We see that the early church gives all of us an example of the importance of sharing with others.

Because of the impact he would later have, the name of one man is named in relationship to his sharing to meet the needs of others. We read in Acts 4:36-37, “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.” Here we are

introduced to Joses but this is the last time that we will ever hear him called by this name. From this point on he is called Barnabas. The name “Barnabas” means *the son of encouragement*.

Here, we see that Barnabas was a real encourager to others. We see this encouragement illustrated in Acts 9:26-27 where we read, “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.” The other disciples were afraid of Saul (later changed to Paul) and were not willing to believe that he had become a follower of Christ. Barnabas was willing to encourage Saul by sharing with the other apostles how the Lord had worked in the life of Saul in Damascus.

Later, Barnabas was sent by the church in Jerusalem to encourage the disciples in the city of Antioch. He saw that there were many more than he could teach alone. Acts 11:25-26 says, “Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” Here, we see that Barnabas remembered the change that the Lord had made in Saul and ten years later brought him to Antioch to help the new Christians in that city in their spiritual growth.

We see that Barnabas was from the island of Cyprus. He was a Levite and owned a piece of land. We do not know whether that land was on the island of Cyprus or whether the land was in the land of Judea. Wherever the land was located, Barnabas sold that land to help those Christians that had remained longer in the area of Jerusalem so that they could learn more about Christ. As we saw in verse 34, there were many who were selling their land to help meet the needs of other Christians. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” These Christians understood that they had been set free to serve one another in love.

In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children grow to an understanding of the privilege that we have as Christians to serve one another in love. Sharing some of the things that we possess with poorer Christians is just one of many ways that we are able to serve one another in love. However, it is a key way that we can show that we are led by the love of Christ rather than being driven by the fear of people. As we show our children by our example that it is a privilege to serve other Christians in love, they will learn to follow our example. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to serve one another in love.