

We Are One in Christ April 15, 2018

Acts 4:32-37

32 Now the whole group of those who believed were of **one heart and soul**, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. 33 With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. 35 They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. 36 There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"). 37 He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

The Scripture takes place after Pentecost when the apostles are still in Jerusalem. At this time preaching is limited to the Jews and worship is conducted in the temple. Exciting things happened in Jerusalem after the Holy Spirit came on the disciples. People shared what they had with others and boldly testified to what Jesus did for them. As you know, the Bible is about the relationship between God and the people. Based on that relationship we learn who we are to be and what we are to do. How we respond to God is revealed through our methods of worship, our means of outreach, and our discipline of stewardship which is determined by wisdom, knowledge, and our attitudes.

The Scripture Story has two parts. The first part is verses 32-35 which shows group action. Everybody was of one heart and soul and there was no private ownership because everything was held in common. The apostles gave their testimony about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Great grace was upon them all which is revealed by its result - no one was needy. This is because they surrendered individualism for the benefit of commonality. They sold their land and houses and distributed the proceeds according to need. The second part is verses 36-37 which shows an individual example. Barnabas demonstrated his faith by his action. He sold a field and laid the proceeds at the feet of the apostles.

The Scripture today shows the attitude of the people. It shows where the heart is. Everything you say and do is fortified by your attitude. The Scripture is not advocating a monk lifestyle. In fact Christianity in community is not separated from society. The emphasis is on the sale of disposable property by those who could afford it to provide for those in need. The understanding is that the surrender of goods is voluntary and related to need. It is not mandatory or systematic. One commentary states "selling property to care for the poor embodies the ideal Israel." This is based on Deuteronomy 15:4 there will be no one in need among you, because the LORD is sure to bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a possession to occupy.

The ideal scenario is that there is no one in need because you are blessed by God. The result of the law is that no one is poor. The spirit of the law prevented poverty. So, the attitude of the community is generosity. The law is concerned with two things - outward action and inner attitudes. The law speaks to the heart and will of the individual and the community. The whole group is of one heart and soul. The Scripture today shows their attitude. All believers are one heart, mind, and spirit. This is the ideal church where everybody is one in Christ.

We are Disciples of Christ. Our history is in the restoration movement which sought to restore Christianity to the original teaching and practice as revealed in the New Testament. We

advocate for two major principles. The Bible authority and Christian unity where everybody is one in Christ.

What we see in the Scripture is an act of faith. Barnabas sold his land and gave the proceeds to help the needy. In the past life that he lived his trust was in a system where possessions are a symbol of power and value is placed in the self and private ownership. His loyalty would have been to self benefit. His wealth would have been based on social standards and his poverty was spiritual. So, Barnabas is an example of spiritual maturity. Barnabas is a changed man. Now the focus is not on the self; it is on the well being of others. This is the essence of being the church. It is a faith relationship that is framed within the context of a faith based community. They have the opportunity to offer what they have for the benefit of others in order to make a difference in the life of someone else, to make the world a better place by their influence.

Ministry is all about the relationship between God and humanity. The key point is our response to the divine. Which is a change of heart; repentance, remorse for past action, a change of attitude, a promise to do better, and acting on that promise. Jesus taught us what to do. Go out and make disciples, live by the golden rule, feed the hungry, provide for the thirsty, welcome a stranger, clothe the needy, care for the sick, do outreach ministry, and much more.

We are not the Apostle Paul. We are not Barnabas. We are not Apostles. We are Disciples of Christ. You do what you can - not just what you can - but you do your best. All of this is because we are one in Christ. It is for the glory of God, based on the testimony of apostles who witness and testify to the resurrected Lord and brings the community together as one in Christ.