

**Acts 4: 32-37; “One Heart and One Soul”, Sermon # 17 in the series –  
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on  
February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

It says here that there were a multitude of people who had been converted by this time, at this early stage in the history of the New Testament Church. The Holy Spirit was moving most definitely in their hearts, and He was working very powerfully in their midst; so much so, that many of them came to adopt a decidedly different attitude towards their material possessions. They may have seen all that they owned as theirs, before this time period. But now they came to see it all as belonging to Christ. They were coming to see that it should all be used in His service, to help to meet the very real needs of the believers around them. This was not communism. This was not the Apostles abolishing the right to private ownership. This was not their expecting that everyone of wealth would give up being wealthy and each one of them give their money to the poor. Indeed the Apostle Peter will say in the next chapter, in verse 4 to Ananias, “While it remained, was it not your own?” “And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?” And so we need to see that it was not the desire of the Apostles, or the expectation of God, that the early church become either Socialistic or Communistic in their view of money and property. It was not their expectation that any wealthy believer would relinquish his ownership of such property. What we are looking at, here in these verses, is the overflow of their great love for one another as believers together in the church at Jerusalem. We are seeing the wonderful unity of purpose that existed among them; that unity of purpose which caused those who had the means to help other believers, to give of what they had to see very real needs met; and in this way, Christ’s kingdom and cause was furthered exceedingly during this time period.

I believe that we can learn from this, this morning. The truth that our Lord would have us to see is this: When you and I are of one heart and one soul, all the material and spiritual needs of the community of believers here in this church will be met. 1<sup>st</sup> - We will look at the truth that if we are one heart and one soul, all of the material needs of this church will be met. 2<sup>nd</sup> – We will look at the truth that if we are of one heart and one soul, all of the spiritual needs of this church will be met. And then 3<sup>rd</sup>– We will look at the truth that if we are of one heart and soul, God will raise up from our midst, godly men to labor in the work of the ministry. Through the means of this study we shall see how very important it is to be of one heart and mind in the local church of which we are a part.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Let’s look at the truth that if we are of one heart and one soul, that all of the real material needs of this church will be met.** (verse 32, 34, and 35)

“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.” “Nor was there anyone 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 shows us something about the nature of true Christianity when it is at its strongest. There is great thought taken by the strong Christian, for other Christians around them; not just for themselves and their own needs. If you are of one heart and one soul with others in your church, you cannot help but feel deeply the needs of your fellow believers around you. You think about those needs. You inquire after those needs, and you think of what you might be able to do about them. The mindset here stated was this. “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. Surely this takes the work of the Holy Spirit to bring this kind of a change about. In looking over my commentaries in preparation for this message I found this from the pen of F.E. Marsh. He says, “One has said,

in contrasting the early Church with the Christianity of today, “Is it not a solemn thought, that if the evangelist Luke were describing modern instead of primitive Christianity, he would have to vary the phraseology of Acts 4:32-35 somewhat as follows: ... “And the multitude of them that professed to be Christians were of hard heart and stony soul, and every one said that all the things which he possessed were his own: and they had all things in the fashion of the day.” “And with great power gave they witness to the attractions of this world, and great selfishness was upon them all.” “And there were many among them that lacked love, for as many as were possessors of lands bought more, and sometimes gave a small part thereof for a public good, so their names were heralded in the newspapers, and distribution of praise was made to every one according as he desired.” (Believer’s Bible Commentary on Acts 4: 32)

The commentator goes on to say, “Many argue that this sharing of goods was a temporary phase of life in the early church and was not intended to be an example to us. Such reasoning only exposes our own spiritual poverty.” “If we had the power of Pentecost in our hearts, we would have the fruits of Pentecost in our lives.” I agree with him. I think that there are some Christians who spend more time trying to avoid helping other people who have material needs, than they do in thinking about what they might do to help them. It is certainly true that these verses are not teaching communism, socialism, or communal living as being the standard norm of Christian teaching and living. It is simply not the case. As Matthew Poole has well observed: “...not that everyone parted with all that he had, for that would have taken away (at least) the use and force of the eighth commandment; for where there is no property there can be no theft.” (End of quote) Having safeguarded the right to private property, what can we say is our responsibility to those who are members of the local church in things material? 3 things, by way of application: 1<sup>st</sup> - If you see or hear of a material need of a member of the church, and you have the means to help, then you ought to ask the Lord in prayer whether you should help with this need? Now, it may be a bigger need that you can handle personally, but in that case you should speak with others in the church to see if perhaps together you could meet it.

Then secondly, if you are a part of a large church, and you have resources which are greater, you ought to be able to lay all your resources before the Lord and ask Him if there is something that you need to do with them; something that you have not thought of doing with them before, to help others in the church. This may involve the sale of them, but not necessarily. They might be used in a way of opening them up to Bible Study or small groups, or social occasions for the edification of the church. I would observe concerning our passage here, that those who sold these lands no doubt knew that the destruction of Jerusalem was most certainly coming, for the Lord Jesus had predicted it. They did not know when that terrible event would be, and so it would have been much easier for them to think about the sale of lands or houses, knowing what was eventually to come. But the wonderful truth of our text is the evident love that the brethren had for one another. Not one would think of his own houses and lands or possessions as his own; he did not boast of having these things, or make a big show of having these things. He was actually more concerned with the well-being of the Lord’s people; that they would be able to enjoy the same things that he, the wealthier person, had.

And then 3<sup>rd</sup>, I would have you to notice that the proceeds from the sale of the lands and houses were laid at the Apostles’ feet. There was an orderly procedure in this giving. There was accountability. They left the distribution of the funds to the discretion and direction of the Apostles; knowing that they would direct them to where the greatest need was. This eventually, I believe, led to the formation of the diaconate in Acts 6. The Apostles had become very involved in the practical side of what needed to be done to help widows and orphans and other needy people in the church; so much so, that they did not think that they were spending enough time in the Word of the God and prayer. But I want you to see that there was, with them, an orderly way of evaluating where the money or possessions could be best placed. That orderly process

involved an evaluation by the leadership of the local church; many good minds working together to see the many needs of 8,000 or more people, were met. These gifts, on the part of some, went beyond the tithes and offerings which they had regularly been giving to the church. I believe that the Bible teaches that we as New Testament Christians should give at least a 10<sup>th</sup> of our income to help forward the work of the Lord in the local church. Abraham gave a tenth part of all, it says in Hebrews 7: 2. Abraham, who is the father of all the faithful, Jew and Gentile, paid tithes to Melchizedek who was a type of Christ. He did this before he received the sign of circumcision. He did this as a Gentile. And further, we have the witness of Malachi 3: 8, where through the prophet God says, "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, and try Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, 'If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.'" What great blessings await those who have a heart to give to the Lord's work. If you give the tithe, you may even find that will be able to go beyond it because you have given it. You will find that you are able to engage in helping the Lord's people with free will offerings, such as these that were offered in the early Church. And then, truly no one will lack.

Where is the true treasure for the strong Christian? He is laying it up in heaven. Listen to Proverbs 10: 14 and 15. "Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction." "The rich man's wealth is his strong city; the destruction of the poor is their poverty." Wise people will store up the knowledge that their true riches are the spiritual riches. But using that knowledge, the wise man will be blessed by God in his financial situation to the place where he will have enough to meet his needs and he will still be praying to be able to give to others as well. This wealth is his strong city. Listen to 2 Corinthians 9: 6 – "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." "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." Ah, this is what happens when God's people are of one heart and one soul in the things that they pursue together. The needs of all of God's dear people are truly met in a Biblical, and righteous, and God-glorifying way.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Let's look at the truth that if we are one heart and one mind, all of the real spiritual needs of this church will be met.** (verse 33)

"And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." "And great grace was upon them all." The apostles gave witness to the resurrection power of Christ bringing about the meeting of all of these material needs. They witnessed to the fact that it was Christ's resurrection power that had given these thousands of people unity in doctrine, and love in their hearts for each other. They proclaimed the message of the gospel boldly and publicly. And that message was verified by the great unity which they experienced among themselves as a church. Unity among the brethren is pleasing to God. When a church is united in the doctrines of the Gospel and the Word of God, they can give great witness to the resurrection power of Christ, before all the watching world. This is what happened here. The attitude of the apostles and all the believing congregation toward their possessions and meeting each other's real needs, set the stage for the apostle's being able to preach the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ with greater power than ever before. These good works done out of love for Christ and love for the brethren, in and of themselves, bore witness to Christ's resurrection power which was working in their lives. It was His resurrection power that had brought about this great transformation of mind and heart. And so, each one could live in this unselfish and God-glorifying way.

We hear much in our day about dead orthodoxy. No doubt, there is much of it around. Why? It is because some pastors and some people of churches do not realize this truth. Or perhaps they neglect it, and fail to seek the Spirit's power and blessing upon their ministries. I

am not now talking about seeking for Charismatic gifts. It is seeking for Spirit given grace that I am speaking about. It says here in verse 33 that “great grace was upon them all”. It was because Jesus was raised from the dead that this congregation prayed fervently, and the place where they were assembled was shaken. A bold declaration of the resurrection power of Christ, in connection with the preaching of the Word, took place through the apostles. And mighty works of meeting real needs were taking place. When the apostles preached to both the congregation of the church, and also to the unconverted Jews, their message rang true. It witnessed to the minds of both those who had received Christ, and those had not received Him, as of yet. It is not enough that our church be orthodox; praise God that we are. But we must also give witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ in what we say and do.

Let us tell people who come to us, that if they see anything of love, anything of power, anything of grace in us, it is all due to the Holy Spirit’s working. I have often tried to teach you that the whole life of this church rests upon the preaching of God’s blessed Word. But this verse here proves that the whole life of the church and the preaching of God’s blessed Word actually rests upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It rests upon His power being communicated to us by His Holy Spirit to do His will. It is His power that is given to men to preach that makes the difference. It is His love poured into the hearts of His people by His Holy Spirit that causes the growth of the body and the usefulness of each member of the body of believers, to Christ Himself. Oh, let us pray for more of this power to be seen among us.

**And then 3<sup>rd</sup> – Let’s consider the truth that if we are of one heart and soul, God will raise up from our midst, godly men to labor in the work of the ministry.**

(verse 36)

We are actually given a real life example of all that we have been speaking of here today. It is Barnabas. “And Joses (also called Joseph in the NASB), 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 apostle’s feet.” It will be a very good thing if we can understand that the people that God will add to our church will be of all different kinds. Not every man will be a Barnabas. But how we ought to thank God if He does add a man like this to our local church. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift to His Church; and His raising up “Sons of Encouragement” is a very merciful and great gift. It was the apostles who re-named this man “Barnabas”. He was a Levite. He was the first fruits of Christ among the Jewish priests. He was from Cyprus; evidently one of the Jews of the Dispersion, and as Matthew Henry says, “It is probable that he presided in their synagogue-worship, and according to the duty of that tribe, taught them the good knowledge of the Lord.” In that day it was a very great thing for a man to have the gift of prophecy. In 1 Corinthians 14: 1 it says: “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.” “For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.” “But he who prophecies speaks edification, and exhortation, and comfort to men.” The word “exhortation” there could also be translated “encouragement”. It is the word *παρακλεις* (paraklesis). It is close to the same word used in John Chapter 14, verse 16 – “Paraclete”, *παρακλητος*, “one called alongside to help”. It can also be translated, “advocate”, and is used of the Lord Jesus in 1 John Chapter 2, verse 1. “We have an Advocate with the Father.” This word, in the context, means “one who pleads another’s cause, exhorts, comforts, prays for another.”

A.T. Robertson says, “Encouragement is the chief idea in *παρακλεις*; through exhortation, comfort, and consolation.” Let me ask you in closing whether you are this kind of a person because of grace? You may not have the gift of prophecy, which in our day would be the ability to comfort and encourage through the preaching and sharing of the Scriptures. But do you seek to encourage other believers around you with good deeds that you do for them by the grace of

God? Do you seek to build them up with little portions of Scripture or particular verses? This is a very encouraging thing to downcast and struggling believers, and I would urge you to pray about undertaking such a ministry; careful to use the Scripture in a way that will truly comfort and build up the believer who is hurting emotionally or has suffered the loss of a loved one. Let us all seek to be those who seek to encourage one another to live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and who has given Himself for us. In Philippians Chapter 2, verse 1, Paul says: “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than himself.” “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

Barnabas was this kind of a man; are you? It says in Acts Chapter 11, verse 19: “Now those who were scattered after the persecution of Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.” “But some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.” “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number turned to the Lord.” “Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.” “When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.” “For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” “And a great many people were added to the Lord.” See what great things come from a man of encouragement, a man full of the Holy Spirit and faith. And see the great good which comes about for Christ’s kingdom when many believers are of one heart and one soul. Let us pursue this together; this kind of a walk with Christ, and I believe that the hand of the Lord will be with us.