



Message #11
'THE RADICAL COMMUNITY'
Acts 4:32-37

The Christian life is a public life. It's not cloaked in secrecy or hidden deep within some secret club meeting behind closed doors. One of the ways our faith in Jesus is displayed to the outside world is through a visible fellowship of believers with one another. To be a Christian means to live in unity with God through Christ, and to live in unity with God's people, the church. In this passage, Luke shines a light on the unique role that fellowship plays in the Christian life.

Read Acts 4:32-37

Perhaps the most important part of this passage is found in the phrase 'All the believers were one, in heart and mind.' (4:32).

According to the text, the church was marked by its unity. The question for us is: what kind of unity is found in these verses, and how should we (C@G) strive today to emulate it?

It wasn't a superficial unity arrived at by compromising, or dismissing, doctrinal distinctives. This unity was:

- Deep and abiding
• A passionate commitment to each other
• A passionate, corporate, commitment to their common mission
• A powerful testimony (see John 13:35; John 17:21)
• A spiritual reality based in the unity we have in Christ
• Unified around the gospel and established on God's truth
• A gift of the Holy Spirit

John Calvin wrote in The Acts of the Apostles (vol. 1, p.130):

'We must have hearts that are harder than iron if we are not moved by the reading of this narrative. In those days the believers gave abundantly of what was their own; we in our day are content not just jealously retain what we possess, but callously rob others.... They sold their own possessions in those days; in our day it is the lust to purchase that reigns supreme. At that time love made each man's possessions common property for those in need; in our day such is the inhumanity of many, that they begrudge to the poor a common dwelling upon earth, the common use of water, air and sky.'

Bear in mind that Calvin wrote his commentary on Acts around 500 years ago. How would you compare our modern day western society with the first century example of Christian unity as found in Acts 4:32-37

What do you think it would be like for you to be a part of the kind of community revealed in 4:32-37?

Do you think it's possible for a church to be as community-minded today as back in those days?

SOME KEY REQUIREMENTS FOR BIBLICAL UNITY/COMMUNITY:

1. EMBRACE SELF-SACRIFICE (CRUCIFY SELF)

Paul teaches (Philippians 2:1-11) that Christ's humility is the model for our lifestyle to maintain unity within the Christian body/community. (See also Ephesians 4:2)

- a crucified self does not insist on its own way
- we should be single-minded, not narrow-minded

Ephesians 5:21: "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Paul uses the term "submit" 23 times in his letters...obviously an important principle to live by.

2. UNITY IS A PRIORITY OF LEADERSHIP (and everyone, really).

Things like gossip, dissension, factionalism, rumours etc are destructive to the fabric of unity.

The church will die an ugly, cancerous death where biblical unity is not prioritised. (See Galatians 5)

3. MEET AND SHARE OPENLY

Openness, authenticity, accountability....these are marks of a community that meets and shares on a deeper-than-superficial level. It takes time and effort to trust people enough for us to take off our masks. Life Groups are the ideal place for relationships to grow deeper.

4. CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP MUST BE A SPIRITUAL UNITY

Practice the things that enrich the spiritual life of the individual and the community:

WORSHIP & PRAYER

COMMITMENT TO THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD

COMMITMENT TO THE GOSPEL MISSION

The early church had a unity (one heart and one mind) that was seen in its commitment to each other and the shared commitment to a common purpose.

The believers in Acts were so unified in the gospel that they were willing, voluntarily, to sell their own possessions so they could help provide for those who were in need (**4:32**).

And while the believers were doing so out of love for one another, the apostles continued "giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ." (**4:33**).

These verses show that the believer's love for one another stemmed from their love for Christ. They understood that their material possessions would fade away, but their joy in the resurrected Christ would last forever.

What can you, personally, and your church learn from this example?

Make a list of the needs of members of your church family. How can you contribute some of what God has given to you to help those who are less fortunate?

And then we come to 4:36-37 and in these verses we are introduced to one of the minor-major characters of Acts: **BARNABAS the encourager!**

In these verses we learn that Barnabas was:

- a Levite (one of the priestly tribe)
- a Cypriot (from Cyprus)
- related to Mark (Colossians 4:10 and his sister's house was used for early church meetings (Acts 12)
- a sincere follower of Jesus (Acts 11:24)
- well off (he had property that he was able to sell and give the proceeds to the apostles to distribute)

Barnabas was a "son of encouragement" (by name and nature). We will see later on how he encouraged. Encouragement is one the most important things that we can do for others. Scripture tells us that we are to "encourage one another" (see Hebrews 3:13; 1 Thess.4:18 etc).

Have you ever received the encouragement of someone in your life at just the right time?

Who can you encourage this week? How will you do it?