

## Bible Study 15 – Acts 4:32-37 – The Church’s Common Life

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving 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 were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. 36 Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

1. The early church found commonality in its creed: Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul

a) The church enjoyed and expressed unity in the same profession of faith... they believed the same sacred scriptures; they believed the same gospel; they believed the same apostles' teaching or doctrine...

b) They enjoyed and expressed unity in the same practice of the faith... they found unity in and through the ministry of word and sacrament... their worship and witness were God-centred and therefore Christocentric...

c) They enjoyed and expressed unity in the same person and hence in the purpose of the faith... their faith was in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. As their Prophet, Priest, and King...

They were one in heart and soul. Hence there was a real sense of togetherness – of being and belonging in the body of Christ. They were devoted to Christ and passionate and sincere about his gospel. There was real fellowship in following Christ in whom they had come to know the Father through the Spirit.

2. The early church found commonality in Christ’s commission: And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

a) The church was united behind the apostolic message. It was received from Jesus and delivered by the apostles who were eyewitnesses who had been specifically called, commissioned, and equipped by the Lord Jesus... They uniquely spoke and acted in his name and hence great power was with them...

b) The church was united in delivering God’s good news to all...

c) The church was united in divine favour as all enjoyed God’s glorious grace... There was a universal recognition of need and therefore a catholic reliance on grace...

3. The early church found commonality in community: Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

a) Those that comprised the church willingly sacrificed self-interest in the interests of Christ’s cause and church...

b) Those that comprised the church voluntarily shared in one another’s gifts and graces...

c) Those that comprised the church freely supplied and supported one another as God blessed them. Freely they received; freely they gave of their time, talents and treasures. There was no compulsion. There was no law but rather this was a manifestation of grace and love in God’s people.

4. The early church found commonality in caring for one another: 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

a) The wealthy generously gave to the church...

- b) The church in turn graciously apportioned alms to those members in need...
  - c) The church acted for the good of the body and the advancement of its cause...
5. The early church found commonality in Christ's call: Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.
- a) Barnabas was a diaspora Jew, a native of Cyprus, who had embraced the Lord Jesus Christ by grace through faith... and thereby accepted the apostolic authority of the church. And therefore, he laid his money at the apostles' feet.
  - b) Barnabas is used by way of a good example of generosity in response to Christ's call upon his life...
  - c) Barnabas is a model of encouragement for Christians to emulate... We are to encourage one another for our common good and growth...

#### Questions

1. Do you think the church of today is one in heart and soul? If not, how can she recover and cultivate that sense of togetherness?
2. How do we encourage common cause in the church's mission? What is that mission?
3. How can we encourage one another to share our gifts and graces for the good and growth of the church?
4. In what ways has your outlook on life been challenged and changed by being a follower of Jesus Christ and a member of his church?