

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely

ACTS 5:31-32

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Lesson #20

COMMENTARY ON: 4:32-37

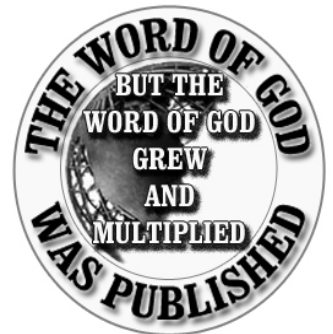
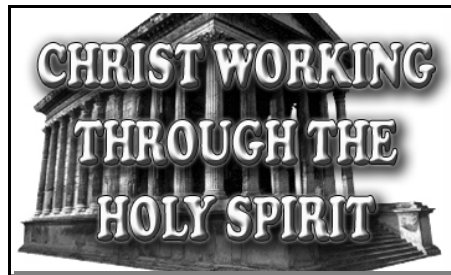
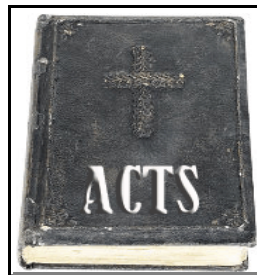
THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

Within the context of the modern church, the subject of "the unity of the Spirit" is largely theoretical. The professed church at large is a gigantic contradiction of unity, being torn asunder by division. Within the organized church, there is very little awareness of true unity. Things have been reduced to being able to get along amiably, and that generally is perceived as requiring being quiet about the things of God. Men think of uniting on a certain point, or around a project or effort of some kind. If they can agree on the priority of reaching the lost, that is counted for unity. Or, if they can find some kind of agreement on the inspiration of the Bible, that is thought to be a considerable advancement in the cause for unity. But all of this has nothing whatsoever to do with the real "unity of the Spirit." Under the New Covenant unity is created by a common birth, and the constituents of the covenant are told to keep the unity that comes with being born again. While modern efforts are little more than talk, real unity is actually lived out in our text. It really existed.

ACTS 17:26-27

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."

"... and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

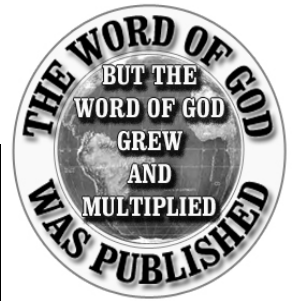


Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Book of Acts

Lesson Number 20



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ALT = Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible (1965), ASV = American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA = Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV = English Revised Version (1885), ESV = English Stand Version (2001), GNB = Good News (1966), GWN = God's Word (1995), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV = King James Version (1611), L.ITV = **Literal Translation of the Bible** ((1976), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MKJV = Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB = New American Bible (2002), NASB = New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU = New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB = New International Bible, NIV = New International Version (1984), NJB = New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV = New King James Version (1979), NLT =New Living Translation (1996), NRSV = New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV = Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK = JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster = The Webster Bible (1833), WEYMOUTH = Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE = Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE = Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862).

----- **Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification** -----
LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

“ 4:32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. ³³ And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, ³⁵ And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. ³⁶ And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.” (Acts 4:32-37)

INTRODUCTION

Within the context of the modern church, the subject of “*the unity of the Spirit*” is largely theoretical. The professed church at large is a gigantic contradiction of unity, being torn asunder

by division. Within the organized church, there is very little awareness of true unity. Things have been reduced to being able to get along amiably, and that generally is perceived as requiring being

quiet about the things of God.

Men think of uniting on a certain point, or around a project or effort of some kind. For example, if they can agree

Those who are in Christ Jesus were united when they were placed there. Only sin can disrupt that unity – by Given O. Blakely

CONTENTS

- **THOSE WHO BELIEVED WERE OF ONE HEART AND ONE SOUL (4:32a)**
- **THEY HAD ALL THINGS COMMON (4:32b)**
- **A POWERFUL WITNESS (4:33a)**
- **GREAT GRACE (4:33b)**
- **FERVENT BROTHERLY LOVE (4:34)**
- **SUBMISSIVE GIVING (4:35)**
- **AN EXTRAORDINARY MAN SURFACES (4:36,37)**
- **CONCLUSION**

on the priority of reaching the lost, that is counted for unity. Or, if they can find some kind of agreement on the inspiration of the Bible, that is thought to be a considerable advancement in the cause for unity. But all of this has nothing whatsoever to do with the real “unity of the Spirit.”

Under the New Covenant unity is created by a common birth, and the constituents of the covenant are told to keep the unity that comes with being born again. While modern efforts are little more than talk, real unity is actually lived out in our text. It really existed, and was therefore manifested. It was not the result of exhortation, but of genuine life.

Because an understanding of the nature and reality of unity will assist us in appreciating this text, I want to take the time to look more closely at unity. **The church is to be a place where this marvelous oneness is revealed, not a place where it becomes a goal!**

UNITY GENERAL USAGE

The word *unity* is not found often in Scripture. However, when the Spirit used this word it was always very weighty. The following table shows where this word is used in the major versions of Scripture.

KING JAMES VERSION. Psalm 133:3 – “. . . how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in **unity**. . . for there the Lord commanded the blessing.” Ephesians 4:3 – “. . . keep the **unity** of Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:13 – “Till we all come in the **unity** of the faith.”

NEW KING JAMES VERSION. In addition to the above, Job 10:8 – “Your hands have made me and fashioned me, An intricate **unity**” (“together round about.” KJV)

NEW AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION. In addition to the three listed under the KJV, John 17:23 – “. . . that they may be perfected in **unity**” (“in one.” KJV) Colossians 3:14 – “. . . love, which is the perfect bond of **unity**” (“bond of perfectness.” KJV)

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. In addition to the four listed under the NASB, 2 Chronicles 30:12 – “. . . the hand of God was upon the people to give them **unity** of mind” (“one heart.” KJV) Romans 15:5 – “. . . God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of **unity**” (“like-minded.” KJV)

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION. In addition to the three listed under the KJV, Zechariah 11:7 – “. . . I took two staves; lone named Favor, and one names **Unity**” (“Bands” KJV). Zechariah 11:14 – “. . . I broke my second staff **Unity**.” 1 Peter 3:8 – “. . . have unity of **Spirit**” (“Bands” KJV).

The word “unity” is translated from the Greek word ἐνότης (hen-o-tes), which is a noun. It is used with the definite article (“the”), which signifies something special, with a specific identity: i.e. “I am speaking of THE real thing.” Lexically the word means, “equivalent to unanimity, agreement,” THAYER “oneness, unity, unison,” FRIBERG and “to be as one person.” LOUW-NIDA

In Scripture, “unity” has to do with oneness – like the various parts of our anatomy comprise one body. **It assumes** working together for a common objective – like the parts of an engine, or a machine. There is something that holds the things united together – like ligaments, cartilage, and muscle hold a

body together. We will also see that true unity is an evidence of Divine activity as well, and that only Divine influences and resources can hold the people of God together.

UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

First, there is a certain “unity,” or oneness, that is created when we are “set,” “placed,”^{NASB} or “arranged,”^{NIV} in the body of Christ by God (1 Cor 12:18) – for “by His doing you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:30).^{NASB} **No person who comes into Christ is excluded from this unity.** He is placed into Christ’s body as a functional part that works harmoniously and effectively with the rest of the body. Unlike the social entities of this world, the church has no true misfits at the point they are born again.

It is in view of this that the church is admonished, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to **keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**” (Eph 4:3). In this case, the unity already exists, created by the Lord Himself, who alone can make diverse things into one thing. Now, it is the work of every believer individually, and of all members collectively, to be “diligent to **preserve the unity,**”^{NASB} “make every effort to keep the unity,”^{NIV} or to be “eager to maintain the unity.”^{RSV} It is not that the unity is an end of itself, or the fundamental objective. **Rather, it is that the Divinely appointed objective cannot be accomplished without the unity.**

WALKING WORTHY OF OUR CALLING

How is it that the unity into which we were placed is to be maintained? First, **the lives of the members are to be lived in strict keeping with the calling** – “worthy of the vocation wherewith ye were called.” Our lives cannot contradict the purpose for which God called us. If Jesus delivered us from “this present evil world,” then we dare not live as though that there the place of our primary citizenship (Gal 1:4). If He called us to be holy, then we must give

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attention to being *“holy in all manner of conversation,”* or conduct (1 Pet 1:15-16). If we have been called to suffer for Christ, then what fools we would be to make any attempt to avoid that suffering by modifying our conduct to please the world. **Living in a manner that is not in strict consonance with our call disrupts the unity, handicaps the body of Christ, and dishonors the Lord.**

Secondly, this unity is maintained by refusing to live for self – *“with all lowliness and meekness, forbearing one another.”* This is a life in which men do not seek their own good primarily, but the good of their brethren. They actually live *“in honor preferring one another”* (Rom 12:10), *“esteeming other better than themselves”* (Phil 2:3), and being *“subject one to another.”* **At the point an individual asserts self-will, the unity is disrupted.** In such a case, the person has violated a fundamental tenet of life in Christ Jesus: *“And He died for all, so that all those who live might live no longer to and for themselves, but to and for Him Who died and was raised again for their sake”*^{AMPLIFIED} (2 Cor 5:15). **Let it be clear, it is not possible to truly live to and for Jesus and yet fail to be united with all others who are doing the same.**

On this matter, I must note the stultifying influence of institutionalism. By stultifying, I mean an influence that causes right to appear absurd and without advantage. It is like causing a person’s vision to be blurred, so that truth cannot be seen clearly. I have noticed that many of the things that now appear quite evident to me were once hidden from me. I could not see them, even though now they appear quite plain – things like the spiritual qualities that are revealed in this text. Further, I do not recall hearing the preachers, teachers, and professors under whom I sat mention such things, much less emphasize them.

Why did this circumstance exist? **It was largely, if not totally, owing to the fog of a sectarian environment. It taught men to live with disunity, and settle for division.** It actually moved us to break the commandment, not keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Subtly, it caused men to sanction a life that was not harmonious with the call of God.



There is a kind of unity that requires extensive effort on our part to achieve. While based upon *“the unity of the Spirit,”* there is a sense in which it is separate from it. The Spirit refers to this as *“the unity of the faith.”* **“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”** (Eph 4:13). This is not a long-range plan, but an immediate objective. A person or group cannot fail to accomplish this and yet remain in Divine favor. That is because this is a Divine objective, and **it is not possible to ignore a heavenly objective, and yet be treated as though such a deviation did not occur.**

There are two spiritual components within this unity: faith and knowledge. That is, faith and trust in Christ, and reliance upon Him; and an intimate knowledge of, or acquaintance with Him and His ways. This is what is referred to as becoming *“a perfect man,”* which is a Scriptural synonym for spiritual maturity.

There are revealed things that lead men into this unity. These conditions are not by means of special procedures and disciplines. The appointed means are the various teaching gifts that have been placed within the church. **“And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; FOR the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”** (Eph 4:11-12). Simply stated, the Divinely established objective is this: to build up, and edify the church until its individual

members fit and work together in faith. That faith, which involves *“the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen”* (Heb 11:1), enables the saints to live consistently and endure, while seeing Him who is invisible (Heb 11:27). That faith has a unifying power against which Satan cannot devise an effective delusion or inhibition.

In contradiction of the claims made by many, *“the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God”* is not academic. It is not seeing everything alike, for everything is not seen by everyone. Perception is developed, and everyone does not move at the same pace. **However, what is truly seen will be seen alike, for truth does not have contradicting characteristics.** If brethren do not see the Scripture alike (which is the articulation of the mind of God, or His purpose), then at least one of them is wrong, and both of them can be wrong. Furthermore, it is not right to be wrong, and consequently it is never acceptable.

This is why the work of godly teachers and preachers is to aggressively promote the growth of the people of God – not the number of the people, but their personal growth. I know of no commandment that charges Christian leaders with causing the church to grow numerically. If they execute their ministry properly the Lord will do just as He did at the beginning – adding *“daily to the church such as should be saved”* (Acts 2:47).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

It might appear as though there is little or no need to say such things. However, the religious culture that is all about us make it necessary to speak about this. Because of the condition of the modern church, much that is in the book of Acts is totally foreign, from the standpoint of experience. For this reason, some are prone to view the activities and

There are two spiritual components within this unity: faith and knowledge. That is, faith and trust in Christ, and reliance upon Him; and an intimate knowledge of, or acquaintance with Him and His ways.

In these lessons, I am approaching the recorded events as an expression of spiritual life. It is an example of what Jesus said would happen once He was glorified at the right hand of God. He plainly spoke of things that would occur in those who believe on Him.

responses of those early believers as something peculiar to the first century. Others perceive the record as a kind of goal to be achieved by means of a regimen. Still others think of it as a kind of superhuman effort that is wholly unrelated to life in Christ Jesus.

In these lessons, I am approaching the recorded events as an expression of spiritual life. It is an example of what Jesus said would happen once He was glorified at the right hand of God. He plainly spoke of things that would occur in those who believe on Him. *“He that believeth on me, as the*

scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)” (John 7:39). This is similar to what Jesus said to that Samaritan woman who met Him at the well of Jacob. *“Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4:13-14).

What we are seeing in this text is living waters flowing out from the inmost part of believers.

- ⇒ It is the well of the water of life “springing up.”
- ⇒ This is the spontaneous expression of spiritual life. It is an interpretation of life “more abundantly” (John 10:10).
- ⇒ This is an example of grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life (Rom 5:21).
- ⇒ It is what happens when the Spirit is not grieved (Eph 4:30) or quenched (1 Thess 5:19).
- ⇒ The “unfeigned love of the brethren” is exhibited in this text (11 Pet 1:22).

If the same faith and life that were in those brethren are in us, they will also express themselves in most remarkable ways. They will rise to any occasion to the glory of God.

THOSE WHO BELIEVED WERE OF ONE HEART AND SOUL

^{32a} **And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul . . .”**

How do you refer to a body of people who have been “baptized into Christ” (Gal 3:27)? What kind of primary identity do you reference when speaking of them? If you were asked to summarize them as a group, what would you say? In our time, some prefer to refer to believers in terms of the movement with which they are associated: i.e. The Reformation Movement, The Restoration Movement, and The Holiness Movement.

Other classified Christian movements include, but are not limited to, the following. Some people think it to be sufficient to be identified with them.

- ⇒ The Brethren Movement, arising in Britain and Ireland in the 1830's.
- ⇒ The Charismatic Movement, of Neo-

Pentecostals – renewal among what was traditionally called *Pentecostals*.

- ⇒ The Grace Movement, a movement during the 1930's that embraced a dispensational system of Bible Interpretation.
- ⇒ The Oxford Movement, originating in the nineteenth century, which sought to more closely align Anglicanism with its Roman Catholic heritage.

Other broad classifications of Christians include the following.

- ⇒ Calvinists
- ⇒ Armenians
- ⇒ Fundamentalists
- ⇒ Liberals.
- ⇒ Premillennialists

- ⇒ Postmillennialists
- ⇒ Amennialists
- ⇒ Preterists
- ⇒ Trinitarian
- ⇒ Non-Trinitarian

Then there are more many additional group names that reflect the body of theology the particular community embraces. There are numerous sub-groups within each of these. Familiar names include Catholics, Orthodox, Reformed, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Apostolic, Church of Christ Non-Instrumental, Church of Christ Instrumental, Christian Church, Presbyterian, Mennonite, Quaker, Shakers, Assembly of God, Church of God, Anglican, etc, etc, etc.

Of course, none of these

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distinctions existed at the time of our text. **They are all post-apostolic, and were the result of some form of spiritually wayward thinking.** The Gospel will not replicate or contribute to any of these movements. The Holy Spirit will not lead someone into any of them, or sustain them while within them. Whatever good may be found in them, the movements themselves were originated by men.

It is not unusual to hear the general term *Christians* used to describe the entire body of believers – although no inspired person ever so described the body of Christ. It is true that it is written, “*And the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch*” (Acts 11:26). Even though some affirm they were Divinely called by that name, there is no evidence that this is the case. No apostle ever referred to the aggregate church, either locally or globally, as “*Christians.*” Rather, it appears clear that this name was given to the children of God by the Gentiles among whom they were found. **That is, it was so readily apparent WHO they were following, that they ascribed this term to them, which means “*follower of Christ.*”**^{FRIBERG} It is a noble term, to be sure. However, it is only proper if it is very evident that the people are, in deed, followers of Christ. It is an evidential appellation, not a formal one.

How did inspired men refer to collections of Christ’s followers, and of them as a whole? What kind of perspective did the Holy Spirit inspire? It is good to make a special note of this, for it reveals something of the manner in which grace impacts upon the mind.

THE MULTITUDE OF THEM THAT BELIEVED

“*And the multitude of them that believed . . .*” Other versions read, “*of the multitude of those that had believed.*”^{DARBY} “*the whole group of believers.*”^{GWN} “*And in the assembly of the persons that believed.*”^{MRD} “*The community of believers.*”^{NAB} “*And the congregation of those who believed.*”^{NAS} “*All the believers.*”^{NIB} “*Among all those who had embraced the faith.*”^{IB} “*Among the large number who had become believers.*”^{PHILLIPS} and “*The group of followers.*”^{CEV}

Within any of the groups that I

have mentioned, and literally thousands of others, this kind of description is not sufficient to identify the whole of the church. It would take in some people an institutionalist would not take in. The term “*believed*” would also be too limited.

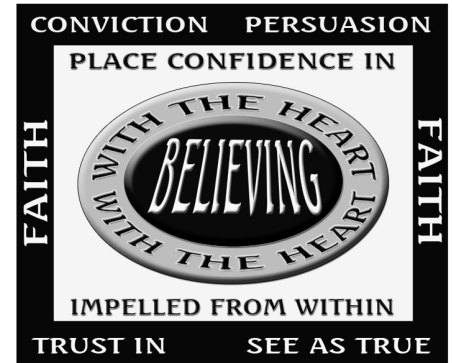
What a wonderful and precise expression this is: “*the multitude of them that believed.*” Exactly what does the word “*believed*” mean? The word is translated from a Greek word meaning, “to think to be true; to be persuaded of . . . place confidence in; a. universally . . . the conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative and law of his soul; thus it stands . . . absolutely to trust in Jesus or in God as able to aid either in obtaining or in doing something . . .”^{THAYER} “to believe something to be true and, hence, worthy of being trusted - to believe, to think to be true, to regard as trustworthy,”^{LOUW-NIDA} “believe, believe in, be convinced of, give credence.”^{GINGRICH}

Although believing does involve the intellect, it is not primarily intellectual. **More of the person is involved in believing than the part that processes thoughts.** There is a strong conviction that compels the individual to do something because he believes – something that agrees and blends with what is believed. Conviction calls for an action that is consistent with the truth. There is also an unwavering persuasion – like Abraham had when he offered up Isaac – being “**fully persuaded that, what**” God “*had promised, he was able also to perform*” (Rom 4:20). There is also the reality of being obligated from within – from the heart. There comes a compelling desire that is perceived as rational, or reasonable, and thus cannot be denied. **To be impelled from within is to be driven forward by faith.** There is also unwavering trust – a willingness to entrust one’s life into the hands of the Lord, because the truth of the Gospel has been seen.

In our society individuals so described are exceedingly rare in the average congregation. In the early church, this was a suitable description of **everyone** in the church – “*all that believed.*” This was not descriptive of a handful of people, but of the entire “*multitude,*” for unbelievers are excluded from the church, and are in no sense a part of it (Lk 12:46; Mk 16:16; Rev 21:8).

In the book of Acts, some form of

“*believe*” appears no less than thirty-six times (2:44; 4:4,32; 5:14; 8:12,37; 9:42; 10:43,45; 11:17,21; 13:12,39,48; 14:1, 23; 15:5,7,11; 16:1,31,34; 17:4,2, 34; 18:8,27; 19:2,4,18; 21:20,25; 22:19; 24:14; 26:27; 28:24).



- ⇒ The followers of Christ are described as those who had “*believed*” (2:44; 4:32; 10:45; 11:17; 14:23; 15:5,7,11; 18:27; 19:2; 21:20,25; 22:19; 24:14)
- ⇒ Those responding to the Gospel are described as those who “*who heard the word*” and “*believed*” (4:4; 8:12; 11:21; 13:12; 14:1; 16:1; 16:34; 17:4, 12,34; 18:8; 19:18; 28:24), and as “*believers*” (5:14).
- ⇒ Those inquiring about appropriating salvation were told to “*believe*” (8:37; 16:31; 19:4)
- ⇒ The promise of “*remission of sins*” was offered to those who “*believed on Him*” (10:43).
- ⇒ Justification is said to be realized by “*all that believe*” (13:39).
- ⇒ It is said that “*as many as were ordained to eternal life believed*” (13:48).
- ⇒ When challenging Agrippa, Paul spoke of believing (26:27).

It is fully appropriate, therefore, to refer to those who are in Christ as those who have “*believed.*” It is an all-encompassing word that does not permit the omission of any required obedience. All “*that believed*” were all who had embraced and obeyed the Gospel. They were the ones relying upon and trusting in the Lord – the ones persuaded that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them

that diligently seek Him.

Now, what will be said of these believers? How will they be described, and what traits will they possess?

THEY WERE OF ONE HEART

“...were of one heart...” Other versions read, “the heart... were one,” DARBY “...lived in harmony,” GWN “...were one in heart,” NIB “...was united, heart,” NJB “... were joined in their hearts,” IE “... there was but one heart,” IE “Now there was but one heart... in the vast number of those who had become believers,” WILLIAMS “... there was complete agreement of heart,” PHILLIPS and “...all felt the same way about everything.” CEV

“Heart” is a word to which the Holy Spirit assigns a new meaning. The word itself is translated from the Greek word καρδιά (kardia), which means “properly, that organ in the animal body which is the center of the circulation of the blood, and hence, was regarded as the seat of physical life,” THAYER “heart, as the seat of physical life” GINGRICH Theologically it means “the causative source of a person’s psychological life in its various aspects, but with special emphasis upon thoughts - ‘heart, inner self, mind,’” LOUW-NIDA

God has made man after His own image. This involves a kind of central headquarters in the human makeup that determines how a person thinks, and what he says and does. It is like the throne of the human personality from which all motives are determined. The Scriptures refer to this as “the heart of man” (1 Cor 2:9; Psa 104:15; Prov 12:25; 18:12; 20:5; 27:19). As used in Scripture, the word “heart” speaks of centrality – like “this is the heart of the matter.” It is the core of man’s makeup – what he really is. From one point of view, this appears to limit people to individuality. However, that is not the case here.



- ⇨ Jesus said that the evil THOUGHTS of a man originate in his heart: “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil **thoughts**” (Mark 7:21).
- ⇨ He also said a man SPEAKS out of the abundance of his heart: “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth **speaketh**” (Mat 12:34) – that is, what he really is comes out.
- ⇨ He added deeds are really expressions of the heart: “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth **good things**; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth **evil things**” (Mat 12:35).
- ⇨ He also spoke of the deeds of men as coming from the heart. “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt 15:19). There you have the entirety of human expression – thoughts, words, and deeds – proceeding from the heart.

The Heart Apart From Christ

Apart from Christ, the heart was man’s primary problem – the one from which all other moral and spiritual deficiencies sprang. Thus it is written of those of Noah’s day, “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that **every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually**” (Gen 6:5). The judgment of the flood did not alter this situation, for after the flood had subsided, and an acceptable offering was presented to God, this is what He said in His heart: “I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake: **for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth**” (Gen 8:21). Years later, the prophet Jeremiah confirmed this condition had not changed. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer 17:9).

Knowing this condition, Solomon threw out an unanswerable challenge to humanity: “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” (Prov 20:9). Again he affirmed, “the heart of the sons of men is **fully set in them to do evil**” (Eccl 8:11). Again he said, “This is an evil among all things that are done

under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also **the heart of the sons of men is full of evil**, and madness is in their heart while they live” (Eccl 9:3).

Of the choice people of the earth, the very ones God Himself chose and cultured, it is written, “Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint” (Isa 1:5). Of the entire Gentile world Paul wrote, “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18). From the human point of view, the situation was utterly hopeless. **Man was sinful at the core, and had no power at all to alter or renew that core.** In fact, God challenged the only people upon the earth who were acquainted in any way with Him, “Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and **make you a new heart and a new spirit**: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek 18:31). Even in those spiritually primitive times, honest men knew that only God could create such a heart. Thus David pled, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa 51:10).

The Divine Remedy

Speaking through the prophets, the Lord revealed that He was going to give men a new heart. How marvelous the promise must have sounded to those who had been convinced of their natural condition through the ministry of the Law. “A **new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh**” (Ezek 36:26). The heart that had become hard because of sin – that stony heart – would be personally removed by the Lord. The new heart and spirit would be prone to God, and would constrain the people to walk in His ways, willingly and consistently. Therefore He continued, “And I will put My spirit within you, and **cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them**” (Ezek 36:27).

Although this new heart would be conferred upon individuals, it would not be individualized – tailored for the person. The heart would be the same in

Those who are in Christ Jesus were united when they were placed there. Only sin can disrupt that unity – by Given O. Blakely

all of the people – “one heart.” It would be tailored for the things of God, and designed to properly constrain and motivate His people. That is why the Lord also said through Ezekiel, “*And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God*” (Ezek 11:19-20). A “heart of flesh” is living heart, one that can grow and be enlarged for the glory of God (Psa 119:32). This would be a heart that did not consider the commandments of God “grievous” (1 John 5:3).

THE BELIEVERS OF OUR TEXT HAD THAT “NEW HEART”

The marvelous unity, or oneness, that was experienced by these brethren was not something they accomplished. It was not hammered out at a negotiating table, or taught in a classroom. This is the church in its infancy, and yet it realized things the church of our time only dreams about. The Lord promised, “*I will give them one heart!*” Our text affirms, “*And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart.*” They had the heart that was promised, receiving it when they were “*joined to the Lord*” (1 Cor 6:17). For them, old things had passed away, and all things had become new (2 Cor 5:17). They were all looking to Jesus (Heb 12:2). All of them had their affection set on things above (Col 3:2). None of them were friends with the world (1 John 4:4).

THEY WERE OF ONE SOUL

“*And the multitude of them that believed were . . . of one soul . . .*” Other versions read, “*and mind,*”^{NIV} and “*and they were united in spirit.*”^{IE}

These brethren were also of “one soul.” It is as though one principle of life animated them all, moving them to think in the same direction, and feel the same way about pivotal and essential matters.

The soul is distinguished from the heart. Thus God commanded the Israelites, “*thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul*” (Deut 4:29). Again it is written, “*And thou shalt love the LORD thy God*

with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deut 6:5). Yet again they were admonished to “*serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul*” (Deut 10:12). They were further admonished to “*lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul*” (Deut 11:18). When they strayed from the Lord. They were commanded to **return** to the Lord “*with all thine heart and with all thy soul*” (Deut 30:2).

When the Lord circumcises the heart – something that occurs when we are baptized into Christ (Col 2:11) – it is done in order that we might love Him with all of our heart and soul. Thus God spoke to Israel through Moses, “*And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live*” (Deut 30:6). Jesus confirmed that our relationship to God was to be one involving ALL of our soul (Mark 12:30). This “soul” is singular, being the same in all of the brethren – “one soul.”

What Is The “Soul”?

Sometimes the word “soul” is used to describe man as an individual

but of a part of their created makeup. Viewed technically, man is comprised of three parts. Listed in order of their priority, they are spirit, soul, and body. Perceived from the evidential point of view, and listed in order of their manifestation, they are body, soul, and spirit.

The Word of God makes clear that each of these remarkable components is intended to be for the Lord. Thus, it is written, “*And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Thess 5:23).

It is said of the body, “*Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body*” (1 Cor 6:13). Even more explicitly it is stated, “*your bodies are the members of Christ*” (1 Cor 6:15). The text continues by affirming that our spirits, or essential persons, also belong to the Lord. “*For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's*” (1 Cor 6:20). In a special benediction to the Galatians Paul wrote, “*Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus*

The soul has more to do with the expression of the individual. It is connected with rationality, or the ability to reason, desire, and purpose. Here is where man perceives, remembers, and wills. The soul has its seat in the mind, not the heart or spirit. It is a part of us that is governed from within, by our spirit, or heart.

personality. Thus we read of “*eight souls*” being saved in the ark Noah built (1 Pet 3:20). Similarly, when referring to a group of people who did the same thing, the expression “*every soul*” is used (Lev 17:15). Also, when referring to the totality of humanity, the Lord says, “*all souls are mine*” (Ezek 18:4). On the day of Pentecost, amidst all of the startling events, it is said, “*fear came upon every soul*” (Acts 2:43).

In this text, however, the word is not used of the individuals themselves,

“*Christ be with your spirit. Amen*” (Gal 6:18). The same was written to Philemon (Phile 1:25).

In a most arresting statement, the Scriptures declare that the Word of God is able to distinguish between the two unseen parts of man – the spirit and the soul, two parts that men have a great deal of difficulty distinguishing. “*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit*” (Heb 4:12).

But what about the “soul?” **The soul has more to do with the expression of the individual.** It is connected with rationality, or the ability to reason, desire, and purpose. Here is where man perceives, remembers, and wills. The soul has its seat in the mind, not the heart or spirit. It is a part of us that is governed from within, by our spirit, or heart. If the heart (which is more closely aligned with the spirit), is corrupt, it causes thoughts, intentions, and all manner of reasoning to be corrupt. If the heart is right, it sanctifies the mind, and consequently the rational part of our makeup becomes spiritually productive.

Technically speaking, the soul has not yet been saved or delivered. Thus Peter writes to those who are in Christ, “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, **even the salvation of your souls**” (1 Pet 1:8-9). The soul of the redeemed has the capacity to think and desire wrongly. Here is the area of our persons at which Satan hurls his “fiery darts” – “flaming arrows,” ^{NASM} or “flaming missiles” ^{NIV} (Eph 6:12). These “darts” or “arrows” are designed to inflame evil passions, and

When our text says the people were of “one soul,” the following conditions are briefly comprehended in the saying.

- ⇨ They were “perfectly joined together in the **same** mind and in the **same** judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).
- ⇨ They were dwelling “together in **unity**” (Psa 133:1).
- ⇨ They were minding “**the same thing**,” or thinking in the same manner (Phil 16).
- ⇨ In matters requiring judgment, they were of “**one accord**” (Acts 5:12).
- ⇨ They had “**one mind**” (Phil 2:2).
- ⇨ They were of “**the same mind one toward another**” (Rom 12:16).
- ⇨ They spoke “**the same thing**” (1 Cor 1:10).
- ⇨ They had “**the same care one for another**” (1 Cor 12:25).
- ⇨ They were “**like-minded, having the**

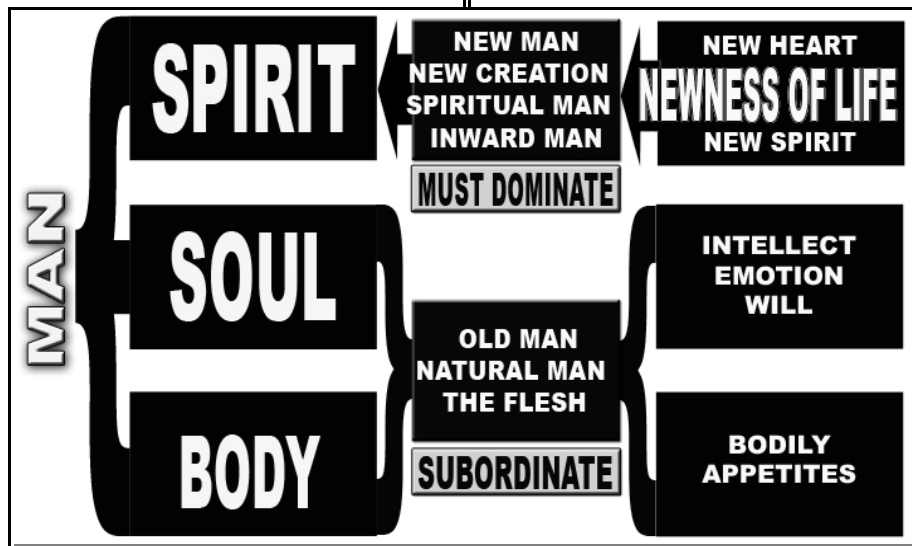
- ⇨ They were “of **the same mind in the Lord**” (Phil 4:2).
- ⇨ They were showing “**the same diligence**” (Heb 6:11).
- ⇨ They were ministering “**the same one to another**” (1 Pet 4:10).

These are examples of what happens when men receive a new heart and a new spirit, and walk in newness of life. These are fruits that grow unhindered where the Spirit is not grieved or quenched. When people are seeking the things that are above, and delight themselves in the Lord, this is what happens – but only so!

In most *Christian* circles, being of “one soul” is nothing more than a distant goal that looks beyond reach. However, in our text, not long after the day of Pentecost, this was a reality – they were of “one soul.” There was one animating principle of life among them. This was, in fact, a sterling example of “*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*”

At this point, it is necessary to make some few brief observations about unity – particularly in view of the complex nature of man. Unity – or being of “one heart and of one soul” – is not something accomplished in “the new man” alone. It is essentially a uniting of what we really are, and secondarily a harmony in the way we think, perceive, desire, and purpose. Our souls and bodies are involved in the unity because of the governing ability of the renewed spirit – the “new man.” The parts of our person that have not yet been regenerated (the soul and the body), must be brought into subjection. This is what Paul was referring to when he wrote, “*But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway*” (1 Cor 9:27).

Unity – the unity of the Spirit and of the faith – is not on the intellectual level. The intellect is associated more with the soul than the body, and is characterized by staggering limitations. If professing believers attempt to unite the people of God by bringing them to all see the Scriptures alike, for example, they will never be united. That is why unity is referred to as



awaken the old nature. If they are not quenched, they will spread their deadly venom throughout our minds, bringing us into captivity. This warfare is the subject delineated in Romans 7:15-25.

- ⇨ They were walking “**by the same rule**,” of principle (Phil 3:16).

Those who are in Christ Jesus were united when they were placed there. Only sin can disrupt that unity – by Given O. Blakely

"the unity of the faith" (Eph 4:13), not the unity of views.

This by no means suggests that there are differing views of Scripture that are all valid. **Difference is not created by faith, but by unbelief and a lack of discernment.** A person's view of Scripture is strictly determined by their level of maturity and degree of insight. Actually, there is no provision for any person in Christ affirming things he does not know. Such a posture involves thinking of oneself more highly than he ought to

think (Rom 12:3). It throws one in the category of those described as "understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1 Tim 1:7). When, like Jesus, men speak what they "know" (John 3:11), **they will be perfectly harmonious with everyone else who speaks what they know.**

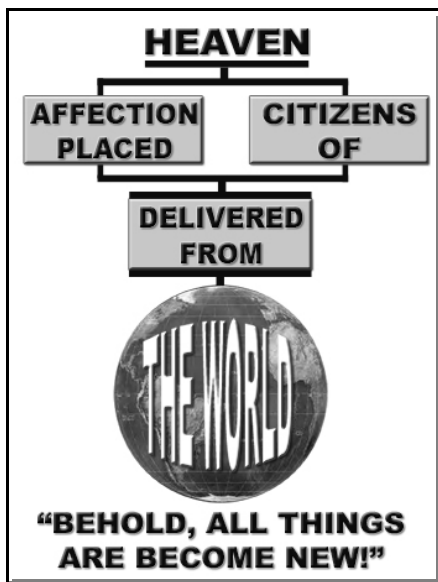
Our text is a classic illustration of the effects of receiving the love of the truth, and walking in the light as He is in the light (1 Thess 2:10; 1 John 1:7). As we proceed through the text, it will

become apparent what being of one heart and soul causes people to do. **Remember, this is genuine spiritual life working itself into the circumstances of life, like leaven into a lump of dough.** Because it is comprised of the Divine nature, that "newness of life" always has the same character and preference. If it is not suffocated with the dreaded blanket of institutionalism, it will still cause those who have it to address challenging circumstances with singleness of heart, and do so effectively and for God's glory. It cannot conduct itself any differently.

THEY HAD ALL THINGS COMMON

^{32b} . . . **neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.**"

I want to ever keep before you that what we are witnessing is not the result of detailed teaching on "how to" live. There is absolutely no evidence that continuing steadfastly in "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42) involved procedural instruction concerning handling crises, what to do if needs arose, and similar matters. **Since the motivators and proceduralists have gained prominence in the church, it is most difficult for some to conceive of anyone doing what is right without having to be told to do so.**



However, when men receive the love of the truth, and are subjected to the unveiled Gospel, they are taught within themselves how to abide in Christ. Rather than memorizing procedures and submitting themselves to ordinances, they become "partakers of the Divine nature."

The Doctrine

The marvelous capacity to partake of the Divine nature is by means of the "exceeding great and precious promises," not a set of commandments or ordinances. Thus it is written that God "hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that **by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust**" (2 Pet 1:3-4). The promises set before us are "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor 2:9). These are very real things, and because of that circumstance "the Spirit of truth" can work with them to teach us.

Concerning this **teaching** of the Spirit, it is written, "But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing **teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as It hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him**" (1 John 2:27). Abiding in Christ involves several factors. It is more than staying saved. It also involves being sanctified, or being

those in whom God works to will and do of his own good pleasure (Phil 2:13; Heb 13:20-21). This impacts upon how men live in this world, and how they respond to life's challenges.

John is not saying believers can be isolated from the teachers God has set in the body (1 Cor 12:28). John himself was, after all, teaching them. Here, he is rather referring to the implications of the truth that relate to translating it into life. Jesus referred to the one who "doeth truth," or "practices"^{NASB} it (John 3:21). The Spirit takes the truth to which we have been subjected, and directs our paths through our perception of it. There is no need for "how-to" sessions, which have become so popular in the church today. Men have elevated problem resolution and developing goals and objectives as though they were of paramount importance.

This teaching assumes the condition of several things. First, that the individual has, in fact, been "delivered from this present evil world" (Gal 1:4). That deliverance is not theoretical, but is very real. In it, the individuals have lost affinity with the world, and is now constituted a "stranger and a pilgrim" (1 Pet 2:11). They are, after all, citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20-21). Such an one has a fundamental inclination to the "things that are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col 3:1-2).

Having been delivered from the

world, and experientially detached from it, these liberated souls are utterly selfless – for it is attachment to this world that causes people to be selfish.

Why Say These Things?

It is necessary to say these things because, in this text, we are being exposed to the expression of spiritual life. The brethren in the fourth chapter of Acts were **really** new in Christ Jesus, and their conduct confirmed it.

THEY DID NOT SAY THE THINGS THEY POSSESSED WERE THEIR OWN

“... neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own . . .” Other versions read, “and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own,”^{NASB} “No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own,”^{NIV} “and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions,”^{NRSV} “and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own,”^{ASV} “and not one of them said that any of the things which he had was his property only,”^{BBE} “no one claimed private ownership of any possessions,”^{NJB} “And they felt that what they owned was not their own,”^{NLT} and “and not one of them claimed that anything which he possessed was [exclusively] his own.”^{AMPLIFIED}

It is one thing to talk about being “born again,” it is quite another thing to confirm it in life. Remember, we are not talking about a small nucleus of people – like the apostles. This is not a statement made concerning a single extraordinary person. There was not a single individual among them who said what he possessed belonged to him alone – not a single one!

Beginning	120
Pentecost	3,000
Temple	5,000
Total	8,120
If only those just converted	
Minimum	5,000

It ought to be apparent that this

From a higher point of view, this was actually a test of the faith of those early disciples. Just as the Israelites were tested in their trek through the wilderness, so this circumstance was testing the faith of these new converts.

statement is made of those of whom it was said, “And **the multitude of them that believed** were of one heart and of one soul. . .” This affirmation is being said of that entire multitude.

In our time, this would qualify as a mega-church. Considering that the five thousand who believed could have been just “men”(4:4), we are being confronted with a significant number of possibly well over 10,000. It is absolutely inconceivable that any such group of believers in our time could be so described – “**one heart**,” “**one soul**,” and “**no one** claimed that any of his possessions were his own.”^{NIV}

It is at once obvious that these people looked at life in a wholly different manner. They were really sojourners, seeing this world as temporal, and their possessions as a stewardship from God.

These people had “*mortified*” covetousness, as all believers are admonished to do (Col 3:5). They had done what Paul exhorted the Ephesians to do – not letting covetousness be named one time among them (Eph 5:3).

This whole incident reminds me of the prayer of David upon gathering an abundant offering for the building of the Temple. It is said of those who gave, “Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered **willingly to the LORD**” (1 Chron 29:9). Commenting on that marvelous circumstance David said, “*But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding*” (1 Chron 29:14-15). Upon seeing such display of cheerful

giving, observe the manner in which David reasoned.

- ⇨ He marvels that they were “able to offer so willingly,” knowing that the aptitude came from the Lord.
- ⇨ He knew that every comes from God.
- ⇨ He knew that God owns everything – even the things we have in our hand.
- ⇨ He knew they had really returned to God what already belonged to Him.
- ⇨ He knew they were strangers and sojourners in the world, and therefore should hold lightly what was in their hands.

All of these observations were embraced by the brethren in our text. They also had the advantage of being delivered from the world and given a “*joy unspeakable and full of glory*”(1 Pet 1:8). They did not have to be told to have this view. Their view was the result of their understanding. They had a perspective of salvation that was more thorough, and more becoming of those who wear the name of the Lord.

A Trial Of faith

There is another view of this text that is essential. From a higher point of view, this was actually a test of the faith of those early disciples. Just as the Israelites were tested in their trek through the wilderness (Deut 8:2), so this circumstance was testing the faith of these new converts. Multitudes were among them who did not live in Jerusalem. They were from other countries, and were there because of their new identity in Christ. They did not have the normal provisions for living. There was probably a considerable amount of inconvenience associated with

this. How would the disciples react to it? I have no doubt that holy angels were leaning over the ramparts of heaven to see their response. Less than two months before this, some of these same people had called for the crucifixion of *“the Prince of life.”* Now, what would they do?

Had a change really taken place in them? Were they walking in the newness of life? Were they walking in the Spirit, refusing to quench or grieve Him? Their response to this challenge will tell the real story!

THEY HAD ALL THINGS COMMON

“ . . . but they had all things common.” Other versions read, *“but all things were common property to them,”* NASB *“but they shared everything they had,”* NIV *“but everything they owned was held in common,”* NRSV *“Instead, they shared everything,”* GWN *“but whatever was theirs, it was the community’s,”* MRD *“everyone was sharing,”* LIVING and *“but everything they had was in common and for the use of all.”* AMPLIFIED

This was not a response to a law, or an edict by the apostles. This was a spontaneous response of newness of life. The language tends to sound strange to our ears because of the glaring absence of unity among professing believers. These are spiritually dark days, even though we are living in the blazing light of *“the day of salvation”* and *“the accepted time”* (2 Cor 6:2). However, the experience available to men during this time, and their actual attainment are two different things. This is confirmed by the near-total absence of apparent unity among professing *Christians*. Even in the smallest congregations – which are nothing in comparison to the numbers involved in this text – there are often abrasive differences and divisions. However, if we are to appreciate this

text, we must rise high above this circumstance in our thinking. **There are reasons for the vast chasm between the church of which we are reading and the church of our day.**

In conversion – real conversion – there are a number of things that happen. These are all involved in the primary term *“believed”* – *“all that believed”* (2:44), and *“the multitude that believed”* (4:32).

- ⇨ Sins remitted (Acts 2:38).
- ⇨ Justified from all things (Acts 13:39).
- ⇨ Reconciled to God (Col 1:21).
- ⇨ The conscience purged (Heb 10:22).
- ⇨ Joined to the Lord (1 Cor 6:17).
- ⇨ Made partakers of Christ (Heb 3:14).
- ⇨ Made righteous (Rom 5:19).
- ⇨ Born again (1 Pet 1:23).
- ⇨ Holy Spirit sent into heart (Gal 4:6).
- ⇨ Baptized into one body by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).
- ⇨ Made a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).
- ⇨ Created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph 2:10).
- ⇨ Baptized into Christ’s death (Rom 6:3).
- ⇨ Baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27).
- ⇨ Our old man is crucified (Rom 6:6).
- ⇨ Raised up by God to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4).
- ⇨ Washed, sanctified, and justified in

the name of Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor 6:11).

- ⇨ Delivered from the Law (Rom 7:6).
- ⇨ Escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet 1:4).
- ⇨ Were enlightened (Heb 6:4).
- ⇨ Christ made us free (Gal 5:1).
- ⇨ Placed in the body where God pleased (1 Cor 12:18).
- ⇨ Called into the fellowship of God’s Son (1 Cor 1:9).
- ⇨ Given access into the grace wherein we stand (Rom 5:2).
- ⇨ Entered into a process in which we are changed from one degree of glory to another by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).
- ⇨ Started out in unity with all other believers (Eph 4:1).
- ⇨ Were taken out of the people by God for Himself (Acts 15:14).
- ⇨ Became citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20).

These twenty-eight things are common to every single person who is in Christ, has been saved, or has been born again. There is no real Christian in whom these things, and many more, have not been realized. They are not benefits that come later in spiritual life, but are all integral to *“newness of life.”* It is to be acknowledged that many, because of flawed teaching, lived for some time in Christ before coming into the knowledge of these things. Notwithstanding that deficiency, they are all very real possessions of those who have *“believed.”*

Can These Take Place Without Impacting Upon One’s Morality?

I do not mean to philosophize on this matter, and therefore will labor to avoid leaving that impression. **Is it remotely possible that such significant benefits could be obtained without altering both thought and conduct?** And if such a thing is possible, precisely what is conversion, and how does one know when it has been experienced? **I am going**

<p>TOGETHER ONE ACCORD ONE HEART ONE SOUL SOJOURNERS</p>	<p>NEW BIRTH NEW HEART FAITH & HOPE RECONCILED NOT OF WORLD WAITING</p>	<p>DIVIDED DISCORD SELF-SEEKING WAYWARD WORLDLY</p>
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to affirm that it is not possible to be a new creature without undeniable evidence of the change. This is the very point made in Second Corinthians 5:17. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new". NKJV The Amplified Bible reads, "Therefore if any person is [ingrafted] in Christ (the Messiah) he is a new creation (a new creature altogether); the old [previous moral and spiritual condition] has passed away. Behold, the fresh and new has come!" **There is not the slightest possibility that this is false, a misrepresentation, or an exaggeration!**

Revealed In our Text

The condition that is realized "in Christ Jesus" accounts for the totally selfless spirit described in our text. **These people had really cut loose from the world, and they knew why.** They had found a better thing in Christ, and were living in the satisfaction of it.

Their view of life in this world perfectly comported with their situation in Christ Jesus. The Savior clearly said when He walked among men, "I am not of this world" (John 8:23). Now, having been joined to the Lord, the believers were also "not of this world." Jesus had also said, "I seek not Mine own will" (John 5:30). Now that they were in Him, they also sought not their own will.

While with His disciples in the body, Jesus said to them, "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (John 6:27). **Now, that is precisely what these brethren were doing.** Christ also said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth" and "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt 6:19-20).

Statements that are made concerning those in Christ are being lived out in this text.

- ⇨ "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" (Rom 8:9).
- ⇨ "... ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God . . ." (2 Cor

3:3).

⇨ "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph 2:19).

⇨ "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col 3:3).

THEY HAD ALL THINGS COMMON

Therefore, we should not consider it strange that these brethren "had all things common," or "shared everything they had."^{NIV}

This does not mean they at once divested themselves of all their goods and property, warehousing it for equal distribution. We know that Barnabas did not sell his property unto later, when he

what is their "own" will be when He comes again, bringing His reward with Him (Rev 22:12).

Until that time, what we have is really not ours – it still belongs to the Lord. Men look upon wealth as something they have either earned, invested, or accumulated. Those in Christ Jesus look at it as something they have been given. Therefore, when they refused to say what they possessed was their own, they were simply acknowledging the truth. They had seen the transitory nature of life, and simply accommodated themselves to it.

The proceduralizers will find they cannot reproduce the circumstances of our text by human wisdom. This was the expression of spiritual life, not adherence

This is the manner in which newness of life reacts. The exact circumstances may not be the same as those of our text. However, wherever men are living by faith, they will "prefer other better than themselves." They will consider their resources as a stewardship to be used in a manner that glorifies God and brings edifying advantages the saints.

deemed it was best to do so (4:36-37). **At this point, the emphasis is not on what the believers did, but how they thought:** "neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own" (Acts 4:32).

That is, they thought of themselves according to truth: they were stewards, handling the goods of their Lord. When speaking of wealth ("mammon"), Jesus said this: "He that is faithful in **that which is least** is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the **least** is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in **the unrighteous mammon**, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in **that which is another man's**, who shall give you that which is your own?" (Luke 16:12). The time when the Lord will give the faithful

to a system. We know this is the case because of the next incident in which two people are judged for lying to the Holy Spirit. They had overstated what they had received for a possession they had sold, doing so in an attempt to look better than they really were. Peter told Ananias, "Whiles it remained, **was it not thine own?** and after it was sold, **was it not in thine own power?**" (Acts 5:4).

Thus, at the time of our text, the totally selfless spirit that was evidenced as strictly voluntary. **It was the result of personal insight and commitment.**

This is the manner in which newness of life reacts. The exact circumstances may not be the same as those of our text. However, wherever men are living by faith, they will "prefer other better than themselves" (Phil 2:3). They

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As men examine themselves to see if they are in the faith, this is something to take into consideration. We know that this kind of response is not the result of long-term maturity, for most of these brethren had been in Christ only a few days.

will consider their resources as a stewardship to be used in a manner that glorifies God and brings edifying advantages the saints. They will do what God intended to be accomplished by redemption: "And He died for all, so that those who live might live **no longer for themselves, but for Him who died and was raised for them**" (2 Cor 5:15). Because of their view of, commitment to, and fellowship with, Christ Himself, their view of His people is elevated. Now they have a heart to live "in honor preferring one another" (Rom 12:10), being "subject to one another" (1 Pet 5:5). This is also revealed in the spirit of an admonition Paul delivered to certain in Ephesus: "Let him that stole steal no

more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph 4:28). Only the intrusion of "the flesh" can interfere with these results.

As men examine themselves to see if they are in the faith, this is something to take into consideration. **We know that this kind of response is not the result of long-term maturity, for most of these brethren had been in Christ only a few days.** It cannot be argued that the attitude of these brethren was the result of a miraculous and overriding intrusion of the Lord into the situation. It should

rather be viewed as a sterling example of what the Lord does when men have thrown off the sins and weights that so easily beset them. When men are walking in the light as He is in the light, they DO "have fellowship one with another" (1 John 1:7). This is revealed in very practical ways, as this text confirms.

Another example of this is seen in the poverty-stricken brethren of Macedonia. **Although their circumstances were less favorable than those of the Corinthian brethren, they excelled in giving to the needy brethren in Jerusalem.** They reacted to the need of which they heard, much as the brethren of our text. Paul said of them, "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: **How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves**" (2 Cor 8:1-3). That is the kind of response that cannot be commanded or orchestrated. It is the overflow of the well of the water of life.

A POWERFUL WITNESS

"^{33a} And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus . . ."

Where the people are filled with the Holy Spirit, there tends to be an extension of holy speaking. This took place on the day of Pentecost. First, all the people spoke, testifying to "the wonderful works of God" (2:4,11). Then Peter rose and spoke with inspired precision (2:14-36). Then he delivered an extended discourse to those who inquired what they should do (2:38-40). A very similar thing took place when Peter and John went to the Temple. First, they spoke to a lame man, healing him in the name of Jesus (3:1-9). Then they spoke to the multitude concerning the death and resurrection of Christ (3:12-26).

We are living in a time when there is an ungodly predilection for

brevity in the proclamation of the Word of God. We are now being told that the attention span for most people is around twenty minutes. After that, it is imagined that people cannot really benefit from what is being said. Such a case cannot be made from the Word of God. Even under the Old Covenant, Divine communication and holy instruction were never characterized by briefness. The delivering of the Law at Sinai was certainly not brief (Ex 19:17-24:3). When God communicated with Moses, he did so for forty consecutive days (Ex 24:18; Deut 9:9-11). The children of Israel stood for a fourth part of the day, hearing the Word of God read (Neh 9:3). When Jehosaphat made an extensive petition to the Lord, "all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children" (2 Chron 20:13). God never led Israel into a convenient religion!

While it is true that these brethren were all filled with the Holy Spirit, it is also true that they were **fillable**. That is, their hearts were pure, their faith strong, and their hope stable.

WITH GREAT POWER GAVE THE APOSTLES WITNESS

"And with great power gave the apostles witness . . ." Other versions read, "And with great power the apostles were giving witness,"^{NASB} "With great power the apostles continued to testify,"^{NIV} "With great power the apostles gave their testimony,"^{NRSV} "And with great power gave the apostles their witness,"^{ASV} "The apostles testified powerfully,"^{NLT} "And the apostles preached powerful sermons,"^{LIVING} "The apostles used great power to give evidence,"^{IE} "while the Apostles with great force of conviction delivered their testimony,"^{WEYMOUTH} and "And with great strength and ability and

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power the apostles delivered their testimony."^{AMPLIFIED}

Now, just as on the day of Pentecost, the apostles confirm that they have been set "first" in the church (1 Cor 12:28). While all of the brethren there had been speaking the Word with boldness (4:31), now the apostles rise to establish the people, for the church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph 2:20).

In the body of Christ, speaking plays a primary role. This is seen in the first three gifts placed within the church: "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that . . ." (1 Cor 12:28). Paul expressed the same order to the Ephesians, combining three gifts into the latter category. "And He gave some, ¹ apostles; and some, ² prophets; and some, ³ evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" ("pastors and teachers being a single gift that has two sides – Eph 4:11). In this text, "evangelists" (proclaimers), and "pastors" (shepherds) "teachers" (instructors) are a breakdown of the wider term used in First Corinthians – "teachers." In these offices the truth of God is declared and expounded. You will notice there is no office termed "praise leader," "worship leader," or something similar. **In the Divine economy, a leader is a teacher who leads the people into spiritual thoughts, not in an external exercise.** That concept is more in keeping with the Old Covenant than the New Covenant. The term "rule" (also translated "led,"^{NASB}) and "leaders,"^{NIV} also carries the connotation of leading by insightfully speaking God's Word. "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation" (Heb 13:7).

Types of Speaking

In my judgment, there are at least four different kinds of helpful speaking among the saints. All of them are not equal. Here are some general comments concerning those kinds of speaking.

⇒ **FOUNDATIONAL.** This is the communication of the verities upon which faith is established. These cannot be changed, and have been

wrought or declared by the living God. They are expressions of God's "eternal purpose," center in the Lord Jesus Christ, and bear directly upon the salvation of the soul.

⇒ **IMPLICATION.** Implications are inherent to the verities, yet are not apparent to the unlearned. For example, in the sacrifice of Himself Christ "put away sin." That is an inseparable part of His death. Yet, it must be proclaimed. This type of speaking can be called exposition or the expounding of the truth.

⇒ **EXHORTATION.** An exhortation is a spiritually logical conclusion that flows out from the implication of truth. It summons the people to involvement in the truth, calling upon them to believe what they have heard, do what God requires of them, and use what they have been given.



⇒ **TESTIMONY.** A testimony is the witness of something personally experienced by the believer. It can take the nature of a report, as when Paul "declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry" (Acts 21:19).

Being of first rank in the church, the apostles were not limited in what they said. They operated freely in all four

of these areas, knowing the foundations of the faith and their implications – fully able to handle the word of God correctly.

In this text, we will see how the apostles spoke of something foundational – something containing many implications, and upon which exhortations and admonitions were based.

Particularly during the past few years, there has been a marked decrease in this kind of speaking within the professed church. There is even a growing tendency to expound psychological and sociological principles rather than Scripture, and to exhort people in areas that are not extensively addressed by Scripture – such as finances, marriage, and material success.

The Apostles

With regard to the "apostles," these were the men chosen by Jesus to lay the foundation, declaring the pivotal matters on which faith is built. In a unique way, the Holy Spirit directed them into all truth (John 16:13). The eternal purpose of God was revealed to them. **That purpose was introduced by the prophets, but it was revealed in its fulness to the apostles.** Paul had particular insight into this purpose (Eph 3:1-12).

In the apostles' witness, they would not major on local issues or matters unrelated to faith. Their objective was to bring men to, and ground them in, faith. In doing this, their proclamation always centered in the Gospel itself – something into which they were given unique insight. **It is not possible for men to read the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and arrive at the conclusions proclaimed by the apostles.** As a witness to this, consider some of the things the apostles revealed about the death of Christ. **Independently of the apostles, no man is ever represented as having arrived at these conclusions.** It is necessary that men see this.

⇒ He bore, or carried, our sins in His body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24).

⇒ He was made to be sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).

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- ⇨ In His death, He was cursed by God (Gal 3:13).
- ⇨ God has set Jesus forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood (Rom 3:25).
- ⇨ We are justified through His blood (Rom 5:9).
- ⇨ We are reconciled to God through the death of His son (Rom 5:10).
- ⇨ God condemned sin in the flesh of His Son (Rom 8:3).
- ⇨ God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Rom 8:32).
- ⇨ We are bought with the price paid in Christ's death (1 Cor 6:20).
- ⇨ If One died for all, then all are dead

- cleanse the church (Eph 5:26).
- ⇨ Christ died in order to present His church to Himself without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing (Eph 5:27).
- ⇨ He made peace through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).
- ⇨ In the cross, He plundered principalities and powers, making a public display of them (Col 2:15).
- ⇨ In His death, he delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:10).
- ⇨ He died for us that whether we wake or sleep, we might live together with Him (1 Thess 5:10).
- ⇨ He gave Himself to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a special people, zealous of good works (Tit 2:14).

understanding. **Some revelations are not made to everyone, but are passed on by means of the teaching of those who received the revelations.**

This is why no person can grow in grace and truth while ignoring the writings of the apostles. Thus it is said of early believers, *“they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine . . .”* (Acts 2:42). **Anyone that is only casually familiar with the modern church knows there is a staggering ignorance of apostolic teaching.** Some are more familiar with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes than with the Epistles. Others feel quite content to know John 3:16, imagining that the most profound theology of all is, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” This is a very foolish statement, and betrays an unsettling ignorance among the people. No apostle ever approached the love of God as revealed in Christ in such a manner.

Therefore, it ought to be clear why the apostles rose to prominence in this grand prayer gathering. Then, following the prayer, all who were there began to speak the Word of God with boldness. Now the apostles step forth to deliver their revealed understanding, which pertained to the role of Jesus Himself in the new Covenant economy. We are given a word about the manner in which the apostles gave their witness.

With Power

Here is a word that remains very nebulous among professing Christians. The word used here is the same word used in Romans 1:16 (δύναμις – doon-a-mis), which describes the Gospel as *“the power of God.”* Lexically this word means “strength, ability, power . . . inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature, or which a person or thing exerts or puts forth,” ^{THAYER} “ability, capacity,” ^{UBS} “power, might, authority,” ^{LIDDELL-SCOTT} and “influence,” ^{LEH} Somehow, all of that tends to muddy the waters for many people.

As used in this text, the word “power” means the apostles were **able** to witness **effectively** – that is, in strict comportment with, and in fulfillment of, God’s objective for them. In particular, this means they were able to strengthen and build up the saints with their insightful words.

There is not an equality among the members of the body concerning insight or understanding. Some revelations are not made to everyone, but are passed on by means of the teaching of those who received the revelations.

- (2 Cor 5:14).
- ⇨ He died that we might no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us (2 Cor 5:15).
- ⇨ He gave Himself to deliver us from this present evil world (Gal 1:4).
- ⇨ In His death, He redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Gal 3:13).
- ⇨ We are made nigh unto God by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13).
- ⇨ In His flesh, Jesus abolished the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances (Eph 2:15).
- ⇨ He gave Himself to sanctify and

- ⇨ He tasted death for every man (Heb 2:9).
- ⇨ Through His death, He destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14).
- ⇨ He obtained eternal redemption for us (Heb 9:12).
- ⇨ In offering Himself in death, Jesus has perfected forever all who are sanctified (Heb 10:14).
- ⇨ Through His blood, we are washed from our sins and made kings and priests unto God (Rev 1:5-6).

This should be sufficient to show **why** the apostles rose to prominence in any assembly of the godly. There is not an equality among the members of the body concerning insight or

Paul spoke of possessing that same kind of power. *“Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to **the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction**”* (2 Cor 13:10). Again he wrote, *“For though I should boast somewhat more of our **authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed**”* (2 Cor 10:8). Paul was emphasizing the purpose of the power, our text is emphasizing **its effectiveness**.

This is the only text in Acts and the Epistles that uses the phrase *“great power.”* This is true in every major translation KJV,NKJV,NASB,NIV,NRSV/RSV/ASV as well as 24 other translations. **They had the ability to establish the saints – a God-given ability.** Speaking with power is not shouting louder, or speaking with a tone of authority. It is speaking that yields results.

A Controversial Point

At this point I will say something that will appear very controversial and perhaps even agitating. But it is the truth, and I challenge you to weigh it in the balances of spiritual understanding and the Scriptures. **Why is it that some men can preach for years, and yet those who are paying attention to them never become spiritually stable, discerning, or spiritually strong?** It is because the speaker has not been given power to edify – else that is what he would be doing! If this is the case, they have usurped the office of preacher (evangelist) or teacher, for we are pointedly told that the purpose of those functions is to perfect the saints and edify the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-12). On the other hand, there are preachers and teachers who deliver words that establish and mature those giving heed to them. That condition is owing to the fact that they **have** been given power, or the ability, to edify.

It might be countered that some have possibly been given the ability, but do not use it. In that case, they are unfaithful stewards, and the ability will be taken from them, as confirmed in the parables of the talents and the pounds.

Now, the matter the apostles witnessed with *“great power”* is specified.

They did not speak in mere generalities, but focused upon a pivotal pillar of sound doctrine. It will have particular relevance under the circumstances.

OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

“. . . of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus . . .” Other versions read, *“the coming back of the Lord Jesus from the dead,”*^{BBE} and *“that the Lord Jesus has been raised from death.”*^{IE}

by faith (Phil 3:10).

- ⇒ Jesus was declared to be *“the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead”* (Rom 1:4).
- ⇒ We are begotten again to a living hope *“by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”* (1 Pet 1:3).
- ⇒ The resurrection of Christ is what validates our baptism (1 Pet 3:21).

Again, let me emphasize that the implications and conclusions that are resident in the Gospel cannot be discovered by human wisdom. No amount of study, even of the four Gospels themselves, will lead one to the inspired conclusions concerning resurrection life that were made known to the apostles.

Given their situation – being threatened by the religious authorities – some might have thought it appropriate to speak on being steadfast, or the role of suffering in the life of faith, etc., etc. In this circumstance, however, the apostles are filled with the Spirit, and are speaking to their brethren who are also filled with the Spirit. **Their message is being directed from the throne of heaven, not by the wisdom of men.**

Again, let me emphasize that the implications and conclusions that are resident in the Gospel cannot be discovered by human wisdom. No amount of study, even of the four Gospels themselves, will lead one to the inspired conclusions concerning resurrection life that were made known to the apostles. Let me mention a few of these marvelous revelations.

- ⇒ In regeneration, we are united with Him *“in His resurrection”* (Rom 6:5).
- ⇒ The desire to know the power of His resurrection dominates those living

- ⇒ The resurrection of Christ validated His death, and inducted Him into His intercessory ministry (Rom 8:34).
- ⇒ We are reconciled by His death, and saved by His (resurrection) life (Rom 5:10).
- ⇒ He is able to save us because, being raised from the dead, He *“ever lives to make intercession”* for us (Heb 7:25).
- ⇒ The blood of the cross obtained its effectiveness when, after His resurrection, Jesus entered into heaven with it (Heb 9:12).
- ⇒ The risen Christ, having entered into heaven, is now appearing in the presence of God *“for us”* (Heb 9:24).
- ⇒ The power employed to raise Jesus from the dead, is precisely the power that is now devoted to those in Christ (Eph 1:19-21).
- ⇒ Jesus was *“raised for our justification”* (Rom 4:25).

Those who are in Christ Jesus were united when they were placed there. Only sin can disrupt that unity – by Given O. Blakely

- ⇒ His resurrection is God's pledge that we will also be raised (1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 4:14).
- ⇒ Jesus being raised from the dead, we can now be joined to Christ and bring forth fruit unto God (Rom 7:4).
- ⇒ The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, dwells in believers, giving life to their mortal bodies (Rom 8:11).
- ⇒ Confessing the Lord Jesus with our mouth, and believing in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, results in our salvation (Rom 10:9).
- ⇒ If Christ is not raised, our faith is vain (1 Cor 15:17).
- ⇒ Believers are raised up together with Christ and made to sit with Him in heavenly places (Eph 2:6).
- ⇒ In His resurrection, we were "delivered from the wrath to come" (1 Thess 1:10).

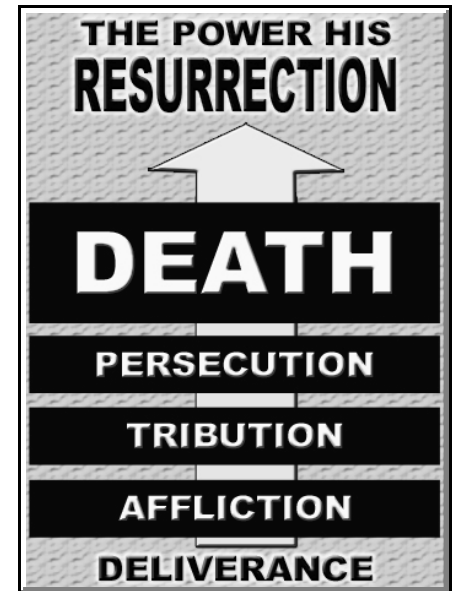
Giving a powerful witness of the resurrection of Christ is not merely repeating the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead, reiterating it in varied tones and voice inflections. The resurrection of Christ is like a great net in which many perspectives of salvation are found – as illustrated above. Part of the witness of the apostles no doubt included their personal contact with the resurrected Christ, and the things that took place at that time. He did meet with them at the conclusion of the first day of the week on which He was raised (Lk 24:36-45). He appeared to them again on the next first day of the week (John 20:26-29). There was the time He appeared on the shore after some of them went fishing, and directed a great catch of fish to come into their nets (John 21:3-25). Luke tells us Jesus spent forty days speaking with the disciples "of things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). The apostles may have born witness to these things. However, to do so powerfully, or effectively, the effectiveness and implications of that resurrection must have been delineated. All of the disciples knew the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

However, with the resurrection a number of marvelous realities were being experienced. These included the new birth, justification, sanctification, reconciliation, the gift of the Holy Spirit (who was not given until Christ was glorified – John 7:39), the intercession of Jesus, and the pledge of our own resurrection from the dead.

Paul spoke of his compelling desire to "know," or participate in, "the power of His resurrection" (Phil 3:10). He knew that we "shall be saved by His life" (Rom 5:10). That is not the life Jesus lived **before** He died. To be sure, that was an impeccable holy life, thoroughly pleasing to the God of heaven. **Yet, that life is not the means through which we are saved.** Christ's holy life was in order to make Him a suitable sacrifice. It was **not** the means through which our sins our remitted and we are set right with God. When Jesus dwelt among men, He "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38). **But that is not the means by which we are being saved!** We are being saved "by His life" – His resurrection life. That is the life by which we are begotten again – God has "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:3). He "is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25).

The "power of the resurrection" is particularly comforting to those who are experiencing opposition and persecution. This is because it testifies of coming back power – coming back from the ultimate adverse experience in the body – death. **All other bodily circumstances are secondary to that, and are thus comprehended in the greater experience of death itself.**

This precise point is a matter of apostolic doctrine, and may very well have been expounded at this point. Paul said it this way. "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened: . . . what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ



when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:18-23).

Therefore, in declaring the resurrection of Christ, liberating truth was brought to bear upon their immediate circumstance. **The power of God was fully capable of delivering these brethren from what appeared to be impossible circumstances!** They had access to the very same power that raised Jesus from the dead. In Fact, that power was **toward** them – intentionally focused on them by the God who raises the dead.

There are several pertinent things to be seen in the marvelous prayer just cited.

- ⇒ That there are certain things godly leaders strive for the people to have: " . . . my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may give unto you."
- ⇒ That all spiritually profitable knowledge springs from knowing, or being acquainted with, God Himself: "the spirit of wisdom and revelation

These early believers were able to grasp these things, deriving comfort and strength from them. Their view of the things of God had not been contaminated with the wisdom of men and thinking that springs out of the flesh.

in the knowledge of Him.”

- ⇒ The greatness of the power that is “toward us” transcends all human, or natural, wisdom: “may give unto you . . . that ye may know.”
- ⇒ That the perception of this wisdom and knowledge requires the opening of the eyes of our understanding: “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened.”
- ⇒ That God alone can open these eyes: “That the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you.”
- ⇒ That the opening of these eyes permits certain existing realities to

be known, or discerned: “that ye may know what is . . .”

- ⇒ That the magnitude of the power that is particularly for those who believe must be perceived: “what is the exceeding greatness of the power to us-ward who believe.”
- ⇒ That this is an active power, not rooted in history, but in Divine activity: “according to the working of His mighty power, which he wrought.”
- ⇒ That the power was demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and His enthronement at the right hand of God: “which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at

His own right hand in heavenly places.”

If this kind of power is devoted to working in, and in the behalf of, those who believe, what possible circumstance can put those people – those who believe – beyond the reach of that power? If death, “the last enemy,” was impotent before this power, what of all of the experiences that derive their power and effectiveness from death?

These early believers were able to grasp these things, deriving comfort and strength from them. Their view of the things of God had not been contaminated with the wisdom of men and thinking that springs out of *the flesh*. It is apparent from the results that followed that their faith took hold of the truth of Christ’s resurrection, associating it with the threatenings that had been hurled at them. They knew such men had no ultimate power over Jesus. He came back from the lowest possible depths of human experience. Through faith, spiritual reasoning will now move the disciples to a conclusion. They will be able to triumph over this threatened assault on their faith – one that came from religious authorities.

GREAT GRACE

“ 33b . . . and great grace was upon them all.”

The language of the text will sound strange to those who have been immersed in the institutional church. A highly profitable assembly is generally measured by the number of the people who were there, a hearty response to some financial appeal, or perhaps the honoring of some elite member. It will generally pertain to something the people have done. However, in this text, it will be measured by what came upon the people from the Lord.

GREAT GRACE

“ . . . and great grace . . . ” Other versions read, “abundant grace,”^{NASB} “much grace,”^{NIV} “God’s abundant good

will”^{GWN} “there was warm fellowship,”^{IE} “there was warm fellowship among all the believers,”^{WILLIAMS} “God greatly blessed His followers,”^{CEV} “and great grace (loving-kindness and favor and goodwill) rested richly,”^{AMPLIFIED} and “God poured rich blessings.”^{GNB} “among all the believers,”^{LIVING}

Exactly what is “great grace?” For some, the very expression is foreign. In the minds of many, greatness is generally associated with human achievement. We hear of a “great person,” “a great business man,” “a great athlete,” or a “great mechanic.” Someone may say that had a “great day,” or a “great time.” But what does “great grace” mean?

Keep in mind that this is

traceable to two things: (1) A powerful prayer that was answered, and (2) A powerful word that was spoken. Both of them were God glorifying and Christ honoring.

“Great”

The word “great” comes from the Greek word *μεγάλη* (mega-la), which lexically means, “large, abundant, and extraordinary,”^{THAYER} “extensive.”^{LOUW-NIDA} It speaks of something superlative, and outside of the bounds of normality. If we speak of a **great** distance, it is very *long*. A **great** light is very *bright*. A **great** weight is very *heavy*. A **great** number is very high in *count*. A **great** trial is *severe* and unusual. A **great** noise is very *loud*. Something that is “great” goes beyond the standard, exceeds the norm, and transcends the familiar.

Those who are in Christ Jesus were united when they were placed there. Only sin can disrupt that unity – by Given O. Blakely

“Grace”

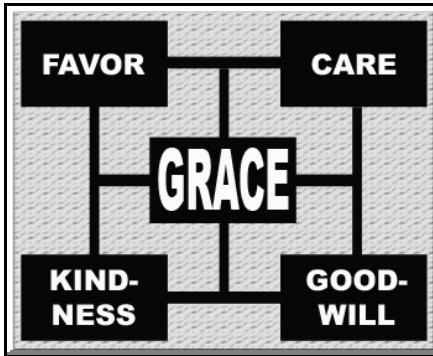
This is a word that, by its very nature, is worthy of much consideration. **This is the first time it is mentioned in the book of Acts.** It is only mentioned four times in the Gospels.

- ⇨ The grace of God was upon the growing young Jesus (Luke 2:40).
- ⇨ When Jesus came into the world, He was *“full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14).
- ⇨ It is *“of His fulness that we have all received, and grace for grace”* (John 1:16).
- ⇨ Grace and truth *“came by Jesus Christ”* (John 1:17).

By way of comparison, *“grace”* is mentioned 126 times from Acts through Revelation. **This confirms the marvelous effect of Christ’s death, burial, resurrection, and enthronement.**

As to the technical meaning of the word, it comes from the Greek word **κἄρις** (kar-is), which is rather nebulous in its lexical meaning. Generally, it means *“good-will, loving-kindness, favor,”* THAYER *“grace, kindness, mercy, goodwill,”* UBS and *“favor, grace, gracious care or help, goodwill.”* GINGRICH Theological definitions assigned to this word by contextual considerations include: *“contains the idea of kindness which bestows upon one what he has not deserved . . . pre-eminently of that kindness by which God bestow: favors even upon the ill-deserving, and grants to sinners the pardon of their offences, and bids them accept of eternal salvation through Christ . . . the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues.”* THAYER Although very true, these contextual considerations are interpretive, not definitive.

- ⇨ The favor or good will of God is contrasted to rendering a reward that is due. Thus, a person who earns what he receives from God does not receive it by grace: *“Now to him that worketh is **the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt**”* (Rom 4:4).
- ⇨ The basis for obtaining grace is faith, which is itself the gift of God. Thus it



is written, *“Therefore **it is of faith, that it might be by grace . . .**”* (Rom 4:16).

- ⇨ Grace is associated with the gift of righteousness, which is contrasted with the effects of Adam’s offence. *“But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and **the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many**”* (Rom 5:15).
- ⇨ Grace is known for its superior and abounding qualities. *“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, **grace did much more abound**”* (Rom 5:20).
- ⇨ Beng under grace is contrasted with being under Law. *“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace”* (Rom 6:14).
- ⇨ Something received by grace is contrasted with something received by works. *“And if by grace, then is it **no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work**”* (Rom 11:6).
- ⇨ Rather than grace being associated with the works of men, it is connected with the purpose of God. *“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own **purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began**”* (2 Tim 1:9).

All of this leaves the matter of defining grace academically extremely difficult. **If you research lexicons, dictionaries, and encyclopedias on the subject of grace, you will be struck with the difficulty men have defining it.** They draw some very proper conclusions, but leave us grasping when it comes to a technical definition. For example, the English word *“grace”* is defined as *“unmerited divine assistance given humans for their regeneration or sanctification b : a virtue coming from God c : a state of sanctification enjoyed through divine grace.”* MERRIAM-WEBSTER Technically, that is a use of the word, not a definition of it. The definition is lexically brief: *“good-will, loving-kindness, favor.”*

Briefly stated, the grace of God speaks of God’s basic inclination to bless, or benefit – something He does because of desire, not obligation. With this in mind, *“great grace”* equates to abundant favor, copious benefits, and unusual profit resulting from the presence of the Lord. It is God lavishing His care upon men, as He did upon His Son, in whom He was *“well pleased”* (2 Pet 1:17).

What Does This Tell Us?

First, this confirms that the concept of a God of favor and good will is foreign to human thought. That is precisely why it is so difficult to explain *“grace.”* The traditional definition of *grace* is *unmerited favor*. That very definition assumes that the basic Divine tendency is to give men what they deserve. Grace, in such a case, is a departure from the normal Divine reaction. This, however, is a distorted view. **The basic Divine inclination is to show favor and goodwill.** Sin, however, brought forth the wrath of God, for it clashed with His holiness. It is not that God wants to condemn us, but has grace on us instead. Rather, He wants to show us favor, and now He can do so because of Jesus, and by means of our faith, which we receive from Him. In other words, the whole purpose for the salvation of God is in order that He might do what He wants to do – show forth His grace.

Under the Law

On Mount Sinai, God revealed to Moses His inclination to show favor: *“And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, **merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and***

abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Ex 34:7).

Note that although the Divine hatred for sin is clearly made known, yet His gracious disposition is mentioned first and most extensively. Even so, those living under the Law were not left with this view of the Lord. All their lifetime they lived "in fear of death" (Heb 2:15). Every time the Lord's glory was seen, the people feared and quaked (Ex 20:18-19; Deut 5:5; 9:19). Even the appearance of an angel from God caused great dread to come on the people (Judges 13:21-22).

Heathen Religions

This inability of natural men to discern this primary Divine trait of grace is also seen in all heathen religions. They depict God as basically angry, requiring that men do something to appease His wrath. This is a universal perception.

Things Grace Presumes

There are a number of things presumed by the New Covenant experience of God's grace.

- ⇒ That a satisfactory atonement for sin has been accomplished.
- ⇒ That sin has been put away from Divine consideration.
- ⇒ That the person has been reconciled to God.
- ⇒ That a fundamental peace between God and man has been made.
- ⇒ That faith is found in the recipient of the grace.
- ⇒ That God finds delight in the one receiving the grace.
- ⇒ That a suitable Representative of redeemed humanity is sitting at God's right hand.

Where these, and similar, traits are found, grace can be dispensed: that is, God's favor, good will, and loving-

kindness can be righteously lavished upon the people.

What This Means

All of this means that at the time of our text, the people had a heightened awareness of the Person of God and the effectiveness of the work of Jesus Christ. To put it another way, their faith was strong. Their prayer had yielded results in them that was bringing glory to God, and he was kindly disposed toward them. Rather than provoking the Lord, as some in Corinth would do later (1 Cor 10:22), they were walking "worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:10).

If "great grace" was found among them, then the things grace brings must have been abounding. If it is true that we have "believed through grace" (Acts 18:27), then believing must have risen to unprecedented measures, pushing all

conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward" (2 Cor 1:12).

One other thing that accompanies "great grace" is great Divine tutelage. This perspective is encapsulated in the word declared in Titus 2:11-12. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 11-2:13).

This being the case, a great outpouring of grace would result in a keen discernment of both good and evil, together with an undiminished preference for righteousness and an abhorrence for ungodliness. There would also be a corresponding fervent looking for, and anticipation of, the return of the Lord Jesus. The presence or absence of such

In this, the threats that had been leveled against them no longer had any effect upon them. Like the righteous do, they became "bold as a lion" (Pro 28:1), confidently and insightfully speaking forth the word of God without being intimidated in the slightest by their enemies.

doubt and fear from their presence. If it is true that God has "given to us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace" (2 Thess 2:16), then enriching comfort must be been poured forth in copious measures, and hope must have risen to prominence. **In this, the threats that had been leveled against them no longer had any effect upon them.** Like the righteous do, they became "bold as a lion" (Pro 28:1), confidently and insightfully speaking forth the word of God without being intimidated in the slightest by their enemies. **They were thus enabled to boldly conduct their lives toward God in a hostile world and a threatening religious environment.** Paul spoke of this posture when he wrote, "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our

virtues testifies to the presence or absence of the grace of God.

WAS UPON THEM ALL

"... was upon them all." Other versions read, "was with all of them,"^{GWN} "among all the believers,"^{TE} "and a wonderful spirit of generosity pervaded the whole fellowship."^{PHILLIPS}

This confirms there were more at this meeting than the apostles. First, as I have mentioned before, we have no text of Scripture that clearly states that the apostles gathered together alone following Christ's ascension into heaven.

There are frequent references to "all" in the book of Acts. None of them clearly indicate they are limited to the apostles, and there is no reason to be bound to such a conclusion here.

- ⇨ “These **all continued** with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts 1:14).
- ⇨ “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, **they were all with one accord** in one place” (Acts 2:1).
- ⇨ “And **they were all filled** with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4).
- ⇨ “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof **we all are witnesses**” (Acts 2:32).
- ⇨ “And **all that believed** were together, and had all things common” (Acts 2:44).
- ⇨ “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and **they were all filled** with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).

- ⇨ “And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and **great grace was upon them all**” (Acts 4:33).
- ⇨ “And great fear came upon **all the church**, and upon as many as heard these things” (Acts 5:11).
- ⇨ “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and **they were all with one accord** in Solomon’s porch” (Acts 5:12).
- ⇨ “And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and **they were all scattered** abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, **except the apostles**” (Acts 8:1).

I conclude that “great grace” all of the church – particularly those who prayed. That great outpouring of Divine favor followed the powerful witness of the resurrection of Christ by the apostles. It is as though God was well pleased to

hear His Son extolled, for He Himself had exalted Him high above all things.

Finally, “great grace” is for the whole church, not just a segment of it. It was the apostle John himself, who is a central figure in our text, that wrote, “And of His fulness **have all we received, and grace for grace**” (John 1:16). Concerning that “fulness” it is also written “**the church, which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all**” (Eph 1:22-23). The church, therefore, is the intended repository for the fulness of Christ Jesus, which includes “great grace.”

If we desire “great grace” to be upon the church today, we must be about speaking the things that honor Jesus and point to His glorious triumph over ever foe of man: the devil, the world, corrupt religion, death, and the grave. We must not allow anything to upstage the risen and exalted Christ – particularly a message that centers in the church. **When the Gospel message becomes corrupt, great grace will not be conferred upon the people.**

FERVENT BROTHERLY LOVE

“³⁴ Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold . . . ”

Peter, also prominent in our text, wrote to scattered believers, “*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto **unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently***” (1 Pet 1:22). And again, “*And above all*

*things have **fervent charity** among yourselves*” (1 Pet 4:8). Again he wrote, “*And beside this, giving all diligence, add . . . to godliness **brotherly kindness***” (2 Pet 1:7). At that time, a little over thirty years later, considerable carnality had crept into the church through false teachers. That necessitated an exhortation to have fervent love for one another.

James, doubtless among the number of our text, also had to speak

about the matter of fervent charity and brotherly kindness, being compelled to do so by the miserable state of those to whom he wrote. “*If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone*” (James 2:15-17). But he did not have to speak in this manner on the occasion of which we are reading.

John delivered a similar exhortation to those receiving his first epistle. “*But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and*

At that time, a little over thirty years later, considerable carnality had crept into the church through false teachers. That necessitated an exhortation to have fervent love for one another.

in truth" (1 John 3:17-18). In our text, however, no such exhortation was required.

Even though there may not have been full maturity in these saints, yet they were able to participate in a level of spiritual life that is scarcely seen in our time. **It was their purity of heart and total enthralment with the Savior that moved them in this direction, for this is the manner of newness of life.** They had crucified the flesh, as we are told those in Christ do, and therefore were more mindful of one another. *"And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts"* (Gal 5:24).

It is important that we see **why** the following conditions were found within the early church. They did not represent a major achievement, preceded by sundry exhortations. It was rather owing to two primary causes.

- ⇒ They had severed their association with the world, having effectually "escaped" its corrupting influence (2 Pet 2:2).
- ⇒ Unlike the Corinthians, they were experientially "reconciled to God," putting them in harmony with Him (2 Cor 5:20).

I cannot overemphasize that the present state of the church is not a normal one. What we have on our hands is a church at large that is not the intended outcome of Christ's atoning death. Generally speaking, the modern church cannot appropriately be described as the bride of Christ who is making herself ready for her Husband. However, this **is** the description of those who will be "forever with the Lord." As it is written, *"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready"* (Rev 19:7).

The church in our text is not the pattern church, **it is the normal church** – the one that is living by faith and walking in the Spirit. That is what accounts for the conditions of which we now read. This is the kind of thing the Holy Spirit does in those who do not quench, grieve, or resist Him (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19; Acts 7:51).

NONE THAT LACKED

"Neither was there any among them that lacked . . ." Other versions read, *"For there was not a needy person among them,"*^{NASB} *"For neither was there any one in want among them,"*^{DARBY} *"None of them needed anything,"*^{GWN} *"And no one among them was destitute,"*^{MRD} *"None of their members was ever in want,"*^{NJB} *"no poverty,"*^{LIVING} and *"Nor was there a destitute or needy person among them."*^{AMPLIFIED}

We know that at least one member of the early church was formerly a beggar. It was the man around which all of this controversy was initiated (Acts 3:2,3,10). **But he was not begging now!** Luke is very specific in his statement, going out of his way to reveal the condition that existed among those early followers of Jesus. *"None of their members was ever in want."*^{NJB} **"None of them!"** That is an arresting statement.

This text explodes the "prosperity" myth. These brethren did not lack because they owned things, or was blessed by the Lord with an abundance, as some allege, saying that this is involved in being freed from the curse of the Law. Rather, it will be

This text does not mean that everyone divested themselves of all property, bringing the proceeds to a common place for equal distribution among the brethren. This was not the practice of communism, as ordinarily perceived. Rather, this was done from time to time, and on an as needed basis.

confirmed, no one lacked because they became recipients of mercy from the rest of the brethren. That is wholly a different matter than obtaining personal wealth.

If the "prosperity" gospel was true, this is the time when it would have been demonstrated, for the church was pure. Now, the Spirit moves Luke to provide an explanation for this remarkable circumstance.

AS MANY AS WERE POSSESSORS

" . . . for as many as were possessors of lands or houses. . . " Other

versions read, *"for all who were owners of land or houses,"*^{NASB} *"owned property or houses,"*^{NAB} *"possessors of fields or houses,"*^{YLT} and *"owners of farms or houses."*^{WILLIAMS}

Not everyone had lands or houses, therefore we read of those who did, which distinguished them from the others in this regard. This again contradicts the "prosperity" doctrine that, as of 2007, is sweeping the church world. Here was the church in its purest state, yet of all the grace that was showered upon them (and "great grace was upon them all") that grace did not include an increase of property and possessions.

Being moved along by the Holy Spirit, Luke provides an explanation for why not a single person lacked among them. This is the manner in which the Lord worked within the body of Christ.

SOLD THEM AND BROUGHT THE PRICES

" . . . sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold . " Other versions read, *"sold them and brought the proceeds,"*^{NKJV} *"would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales,"*^{NASB} *"From time to time . . . sold*

them and brought the money from the sales,"^{NIV} *"exchanging them for money, took the price of them,"*^{BBE} *"Selling them, brought the price of what was sold,"*^{DARBY} *"would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale,"*^{NAB} *"were selling them and bringing the proceeds from the sales,"*^{NET} and *"proceeded to sell them, and one by one they brought (gave back) the amount received from the sales"*^{AMPLIFIED}

This text does not mean that everyone divested themselves of all property, bringing the proceeds to a common place for equal distribution among the brethren. This was not the

practice of communism, as ordinarily perceived. **Rather, this was done from time to time, and on an *as needed* basis.** When any of the brethren, particularly those who were from other parts of the world, ran out of needed resources, those with lands and houses rose to the occasion, selling some of their possessions in order to obtain the funds required to meet the **need** of other brethren.

All of this is against the backdrop of these brethren being very real "*pilgrims and strangers*" in the world (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 13:14). They did not love the world, or the things that are in the world. Unlike in later times, these brethren did not need to be exhorted,

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). This is what being born again does in a person. Only the intrusion of "*the flesh*," in which "*dwelleth no good thing*" (Rom 7:18), can alter this frame of mind.

These brethren were also aware that their citizen was in heaven. Therefore, what they had upon the earth, they held lightly.

This outpouring of brotherly kindness was not a response to a commandment. Nor, indeed, was it their reaction to an exhortation. **This was a**

response of newness of life to a very real need among the brethren. This is a most excellent example of loving one another fervently, and of having no attachment to this present evil world. It reflects priorities that are not common today.

As ought to be apparent, this is not something that can be legislated. Nor, indeed, is it intended to be a precedent bound on all believers. That is not the nature of the New Covenant.

When genuine spiritual life is nurtured, this is the kind of thing that will happen. There will be a holy spontaneity when "needs" arise among the saints.

SUBMISSIVE GIVING

"⁸⁵ And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

There is a willing submissiveness revealed here that is most refreshing to ponder. Personal humility and sacrifice are perceived, as well as giving honor to those to whom honor is due. All of this flowed out from those upon whom "*great grace*" had been lavished because of

feet of the legates,"^{MRD} "*placing them at the apostles' feet,*"^{NET} "*to present it to the apostles,*"^{NJB} "*and bring the money to the apostles,*"^{NLT} "*were laying them at the feet of the apostles,*"^{YLT} "*and gave it to the apostles,*"^{LIVING} and "*and to put it at the disposal of the apostles.*"^{WILLIAMS}

There was a recognition of the leaders God had appointed. Doctrinally, we are told God placed the apostles "*first*"

when Moses' own brother and sister challenged him by asking if God had spoken to Israel only by him (Num 12:1-16). In both cases, God responded to the insolence of those objecting to the leaders He established. Korah and all of his followers were swallowed up as the earth opened wide and received them into an early grave. Miriam was stricken with leprosy in the other incident, being healed only when Moses prayed for her.

There is a willing submissiveness revealed here that is most refreshing to ponder. Personal humility is perceived, as well as giving honor to those to whom honor is due. All of this flowed out from those upon whom "great grace" had been lavished because of sound and foundational preaching.

Later in the history of the church, some will dare to doubt the apostles. Some at Corinth did not respect Paul as an apostle, even doubting that he was one (1 Cor 9:1-3; 2 Cor 12:12-13). Diotrophes, one of the leaders of the church toward the close of the first century, did not receive John the apostle, even casting out of the church those who did (3 John 1:9). But there was none of that in our text. It was a time in which the church was enjoying purity, which is the result of real life from God.

sound and foundational preaching. Herein a great deal can be perceived.

LAID THEM AT THE APOSTLES FEET

"And laid them down at the apostles' feet . . ." Other versions read, "*and put them at the apostles' feet,*"^{NIV} "*to the apostles,*"^{GWN} "*and placed it at the*

in the church (1 Cor 12:28). At the first, this was made clear by what they did as well as what was said of them. From the very first, those in Christ were said to have "*continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine*" (Acts 2:42). There was not competitiveness at that time, as when Korah and his rebels objected to Moses' leadership (Num 16:1-50), or

While this was not intended to be a permanent arrangement, as the next chapter will confirm, everyone seemed to recognize that the apostles had been endowed with much wisdom. It is apparent that one of the enduements given to the apostles was that of how to wisely commence a needed practice. **In other words, they knew how to employ the**

truth of the Gospel in practical ways, and in usual times.

The thing that is refreshing here is that their capacity in the church was recognized and honored. All of this accrued to the glory of Christ, who had made the apostolic appointments. The respect these brethren had for the apostles was not due to the office they held. **Rather, it was because the people themselves were subject to Christ in all things.** That is why they could do this. On the surface, it may appear as though the people had confidence in the wisdom of the apostles. And, indeed, there probably is an element of truth to that. However, speaking more precisely and in keeping with the life of faith, **their faith was in the Christ who had appointed these men to their office.**

DISTRIBUTION WAS MADE TO EVERY MAN

“. . . and distribution was made unto every man . . .” Other versions read, “and they distributed to each one,”^{NKJV} “and they would be distributed to each,”^{NASB} “and it was distributed to anyone,”^{NIV} “for distribution to everyone,”^{BBE} “to give to those,”^{NLT} “each person was given,”^{LIVING} and “then distribution was continuously made to everyone.”^{WILLIAMS}

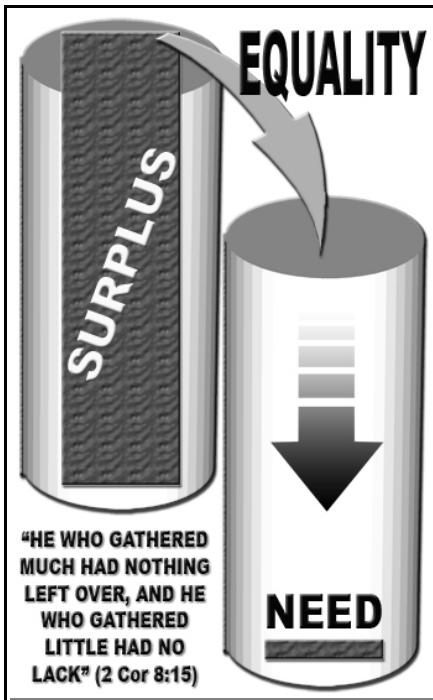
No one was intentionally excluded from the distribution. There were no individuals or groups that received special consideration because of their age, gender, or social status.

This was a managed distribution.

They did not simply place all of the goods in a kind of warehouse, with each taking what they said they required. The apostles themselves made the distribution, employing their God-given wisdom to do so. **They would also make distribution as those who themselves did not love the world, were not covetous, were content with what they themselves had, and were consciously strangers and pilgrim in the world.** That would dictate how they assessed “need.”

ACCORDING AS HE HAD NEED

“. . . according as he had need.” Other versions read, “as anyone had need,”^{NKJV} “according as anyone might have need,”^{DARBY} “anyone who needed it,”^{GWN} “the things he needed,”^{LIVING} and “in



proportion to his need.”^{WILLIAMS}

The Spirit makes a point of accenting the basis for the distribution – “need.” Precisely what is “need?” The Greek word from which this is translated means “necessity, need . . . what is absolutely necessary for life,”^{THAYER} “necessities of life,”^{FRIBERG} Dispelling any doubts about the meaning of this term, Jesus said, “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt 6:31-33).

Paul referred to these as “necessary uses,” or “pressing needs”^{NASB} (Tit 3:14). “Need” is also to be understood within the framework of our Lord’s words. They follow immediately after the above text. “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt 6:34). Just as the traveling Israelites were not permitted to hoard up manna, so these brethren were not given license to accumulate for themselves from the general storehouse, or on a long-range

basis. This, of course, requires a keen sensitivity to the tenuous nature of life in the flesh. We simply do not know what tomorrow will bring – or what a day may bring forth.

All of this was done in consideration of those with “need.” There was no rule against having property or goods. That is what makes this incident all the more remarkable. **The brethren were content with this arrangement** – at least for the time being. They considered life in Christ Jesus to be superior to any life that is related to this world.

Fulfillment of a Principle

There is a Divine manner made known here that is taught elsewhere. It pertains to the way in which God works among His people. Because he had to deal with lethargic spirits in Corinth, Paul made special mention of this Divine manner. “But to have equality [share and share alike], **your surplus over necessity at the present time going to meet their want and to equalize the difference created by it, so that [at some other time] their surplus in turn may be given to supply your want.** Thus there may be equality, As it is written, **He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little did not lack.** [Exod. 16:18]”^{AMPLIFIED} (2 Cor 8:14-15).

The principle is this: a surplus is what is used to provide assistance for those who lack. It was first lived out when Israel gathered manna during their wilderness trek. Every family gathered according to the number in their tent. This included all adults and all children. Each person was allowed one omer of manna. As the food was prepared and set before them, everyone ate according to their appetite. When the day’s meals were completed, everything equaled out. Those with a larger appetite ate more, and those with a smaller one ate less. Everyone had their required sustenance. This we read, “And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack: they gathered every man according to his eating” (Ex 16:18).

Paul then applied that principle to the Corinthians in regards to the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the brethren

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had little. In Corinth they had an excess. **That excess provided for the less fortunate brethren in the mother church.**

This is the kind of giving that took place in our text.. Everyone thought in terms of what they needed, not what

they wanted. No one was reduced to poverty by giving, for there was no one among them that lacked. Those who did have lands and possessions felt moved to sell them as a need arose among the brethren, laying the proceeds at the apostles' feet for distribution to the

needy.

It ought to be obvious to all that this kind of arrangement cannot be accomplished by means of Law. It cannot be replicated by means of a convenient and heartless procedure.

AN EXTRAORDINARY MAN SURFACES

³⁶ *And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet."*

The environment of the early church was conducive to the revelation of good and godly men. It is written, "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:18). **One of the great consequences of a dead church is that righteous men do not rise to the surface within it.** If there are any such men present in such a place, they remain buried under the rubble of mediocrity. This is because there really is no perceived need for them. Consequently, they are ignored in the preference of those who have little or nothing profitable to offer. Thus, a Jezebel could rise to a place of prominence in Thyatira simply because the people allowed her to do so (Rev 2:20-25). **Those who are of a godly temperament and possess some measure of insight know the effects of a lukewarm and indifferent assembly upon them.** If they are recognized at all, it is only a token recognition that is couched in an institutional setting. I am aware of no small number of gifted and knowledgeable believers who attend churches where they feel like a fish out of water. There appears to be no perceived need of them in such environs.

But this was not the case with the brethren in our text. There was a spiritual surrounding there. People resorted first to the Lord, and sought grace to do his will, even in the face of growing opposition. In this case, a hard circumstance caused a gracious spirit to

become known.

A Godly Environment

A godly environment will cause great men and women of God to surface. It is one of the great benefits of brethren dwelling together in unity. It is often through such souls that the Lord "commands the blessing," bringing comfort, edification, and all manner of advantage to hungering and thirsting souls. Contrary to what is being taught by many today, a spiritual environment of this kind cannot be produced by outward exercises or disciplines. **People who have been living in practical attachment to this world cannot be suddenly changed into spiritual people by singing a few choruses, or a prayer beseeching the Lord to come among them.** Legitimate spiritual change is wrought by the Holy Spirit while people live beholding the face of Jesus, considering His Person and ministry (2 Cor 3:18). If that has not been the manner of the people outside of the assembly, it cannot be their manner in the gathering of the saints. Transformation does not come from being in the assembly, but by steadfastly beholding the face of the Lord Jesus. That is a matter of revelation.

Growth is **not** from flesh to faith, but from **faith** to faith (Rom 1:17). Men do not make a quantum leap from being swallowed up with the cares of the world to being strong in faith, giving glory to God. As in the assembly we are considering, the people entered full of faith. They heard a report of threatening being made against Peter and John, and instantly knew what to do and where to go. Having prayed powerfully, heaven answered by filling them with the Holy Spirit. Then they all spoke the Word of God boldly and insightfully. The meeting

rose to an even higher pitch when the apostles stepped forth and powerfully gave witness to the resurrection of Christ. It is then stated that "great grace was upon them all." This is a sterling example of going from "strength to strength" (Psa 84:7), "faith to faith" (Rom 1:17), and "glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18). It is no wonder that a man of the caliber of Barnabas surfaced during this time.

A MAN WHO WAS SURNAMED

"And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation) . . ." Other versions read, "And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement),"^{NKJV} "And Joseph . . . who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement),"^{NASB} "And Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas



(which is, being interpreted, Son of exhortation),"^{ASV} "And Joseph, who was given by the Apostles the name of Barnabas (the sense of which is, Son of

Those who are in Christ Jesus were united when they were placed there. Only sin can disrupt that unity – by Given O. Blakely

comfort),”^{BBE} “Joseph . . . The apostles called him Barnabas, which means a person who encourages,”^{GWN} “For instance, there was Joseph (the one the apostles nicknamed ‘Barnabas, the encourager,”^{LIVING} “One of the believers was named Joseph. The apostles called him Barnabas. (This name means ‘a person who encourages others’),^{IE} and “It was at this time that Barnabas (the name, meaning son of comfort, given by the apostles to Joseph.”^{PHILLIPS}

The name “*Joses*” is understood by some to be the Greek form of “Joseph,” although that is difficult to substantiate, for both “*Joses*” and “*Joseph*” are represented by unique Greek words – not the same word (*Joses* – Ἰωσήφ), and *Joseph* – Ἰωσήφ). The name *Joses* means “exalted.”

There are three men bearing this name in the New Covenant Scriptures.

⇒ One of the brothers of Jesus (Matt

which means “a rock” (Mk 3:16; Acts 10:16).

- ⇒ Because of their apparent volatility, Jesus “surnamed” James and John Boanerges, which is, “The sons of thunder” (Mk 3:17).
- ⇒ Judas was surnamed “*Iscariot*,” meaning “man of Kerioth,” a town in the souther part of Judah.
- ⇒ One of the men selected as qualified to fill the office vacated by Judas was “*Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus*,” meaning *Just one* (Acts 1:23).
- ⇒ There was also a man chosen by the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send with Paul and Barnabas, “namely *Judas surnamed Barsabas*,” which means the son of Sabas (Acts 15:22).

Apostolic priorities are seen in

Apostolic priorities are seen in the surnaming of Barnabas – “the son of consolation,” encouragement, or comfort. This was the ministry this man had to the saints of God, for no others can be truly consoled, comforted, or encouraged in the name of the Lord. This kind of comfort is of particular significance to God.

13:55; Mk 6:3).

- ⇒ A brother of a man named “*James the less*,” whose mother was Mary, who was distinguished from our Lord’s mother (Mk 15:40,47; Matt 27:56).
- ⇒ The distinguished man of our text.

It is said that the apostles gave this man a “*surname*,” which stands for a title. These surnames were given to either distinguish the man from others having the same name, or to emphasize some aspect of his character or ministry. Other examples of surnaming include the following.

⇒ Jesus “surnamed” Simon “*Peter*,”

the surnaming of Barnabas – “the son of consolation,” encouragement, or comfort. This was the ministry this man had to the saints of God, for no others can be truly consoled, comforted, or encouraged in the name of the Lord. This kind of comfort is of particular significance to God. Of old time He said through Isaiah, “*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God*” (Isa 40:1). Again God said of His own ministry to Israel, “*Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her*” (Hosea 2:14).

Thus the apostles duly noted Barnabas, and dubbed him “son of consolation,” because of his ministry to the people of God. They did not identify

him with his travels, any church he had founded, or the number of people he had made disciples. None of those things are wrong, but they are not worthy of great Kingdom distinction. In the end, Jesus will access “all nations” upon the basis of **how they treated His brethren, the saints of God:** “*I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. . . Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.*” The former will “inherit the kingdom,” and the latter will “go away into everlasting punishment” (Matt 25:32-46). **Therefore it should not surprise us that the apostles assessed Barnabas upon the basis of what he did for the children of God.**

We also know that Barnabas was also a prophet and teacher, as stated in Acts 13:1: “*Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas . . .*” He was of such significance at that time that while the brethren there “ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, *Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them*” (Acts 13:2). It is said that they were “sent out by the Holy Spirit”^{NKJV} (13:4). This man is mentioned twenty-four times in the book of Acts (4:36; 9:27; 11:22,25,30; 12:25; 13:1,2,7,43,46,50; 14:12,14,20; 15:2,12,22,25,35,36,37,39). His name is mentioned more than any of the twelve apostles, with the single exception of Peter (by “Peter” 57 times, and by “Simon” 5 times). Barnabas is also described as “a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith” (Acts 11:24)

BARNABAS, A MAN FROM OUT OF TOWN

“ . . . a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus . . .” Other versions read, “A Levite of Cyprian birth,”^{NASB} “A Levite from Cyrus,”^{NIV} “a Levite, a native of Cyrus,”^{NRSV} “a Levite, a man of Cyprus by race,”^{ASV} “a descendant of Levi, had been born on the island of Cyprus,”^{GWN} and “He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus.”^{NLT}

In stating the natural identity of Barnabas, Luke first associates him with Israel, the chosen people, then with his native country. He was a Levite, that is, of the tribe and lineage of Levi, from

which the priestly order was taken. However, he was a faithful Levite, and not like the one Jesus depicted as passing by a wounded Samaritan (Lk 10:32).

He was also from the Island of Cyprus, an island that is one hundred and forty miles long, and varies in width from one to five miles. Coincidentally, this was the first place Barnabas and Saul went to preach after they were sent out by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:4-13). According to Pliny, the island was separated from Syria by an ancient earthquake. ^{ib. 50:2. c. 88} According to historians this city was "Notorious for its licentious worship of Venus, or the Assyrian Astarte." ^{FAUSSET'S} Another resource says of this island, "The Pagans worshiped Astarte (Venus), in a licentious manner." ^{SMITH'S BIBLE DICTIONARY} **Yet, here was a man who remained godly, though a native of a godless environment.** He was unlike those whose love, because iniquity abounded, "waxed cold" (Matt 24:12). Certainly he is a noble example for our generation. Like Jesus, and in his own measure, he was like "a root out of a dry ground" (Isa 53:2).

WHAT THIS MAN DID

"... Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet." Other versions read, "and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet," ^{NASB} "sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet," ^{NIV} "He had some land. He sold it and turned the money over to the apostles," ^{GWN} "He owned a piece of land

Being a godly man, and recognizing the role of the apostles, Barnabas placed the proceeds at their feet, to be used as they deemed proper. These were Jesus' hand-picked and appointed men, with duly sanctioned authority for directing the church.

and he sold it and brought the money and presented it to the apostles," ^{NJB} "He was one of those who sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles for distribution to those in need," ^{LIVING} "sold the farm he had and brought the money and put it at the disposal of the apostles," ^{WILLIAMS} and "Sold a field which belonged to him and brought the sum of money and laid it at the feet of the apostles." ^{AMPLIFIED}

Barnabas was one of several who did this, divesting himself of earthly possessions for the sake of the people of God. We do not know where this piece of land was located – whether in Cyprus or Judea, where the disciples were at the time of our text. However, wherever it was located, it required some inconvenience to sell it and obtain liquid assets that could be used for the support of needy brethren. There is no word about how Barnabas went about doing this. I do not doubt that this is owing to the human tendency to systematize and emulate others. We are only told that he sold the property, and what he did with

the proceeds. **That kind of brevity allows us to maintain a godly focus, as the details of human involvement must be divulged with great discretion, and with godly objectives.**

Being a godly man, and recognizing the role of the apostles, Barnabas placed the proceeds at their feet, to be used as they deemed proper. These were Jesus' hand-picked and appointed men, with duly sanctioned authority for directing the church.

Barnabas did not consider himself equal to them in rank, but willingly submitted to them as Christ's special servants. Whether he was the first man to sell his property, or merely one of a number of willing servants, we do not know. However, special mention is made of him because he was, like Andronicus and Junia, "of note among the apostles" (Rom 16:7). He is also noted because of his prominence throughout the first half of the marvelous record of the early church – working extensively with the beloved apostle Paul.

CONCLUSION

Up to this point in the book of Acts, we have beheld a body without "spot or wrinkle or any such thing." No false teachers, erroneous doctrines, or covetous or immoral person has surfaced. The environment has been peaceable, faith has been strong, and commitment has been consistent. From this point on, however, sundry difficulties will be faced – situations that require holy judgment, words, and action. Doctrinal challenges will be faced as well.

As I have mentioned before, it is possible to view the introduction of corruption as a kind of inevitability. **In such a view, the beginning of the book of Acts, and of spiritual life itself, is perceived as a blazing fire that gradually dissipates, and eventually dies out, or remains in a perpetual smouldering state.** That this is the manner of the natural order is readily acknowledged. That situation is because the curse of God is upon it – it is destined to pass away, together with all of the objects of

its lusts (1 John 2:17). **However, this is not the nature of spiritual life.**

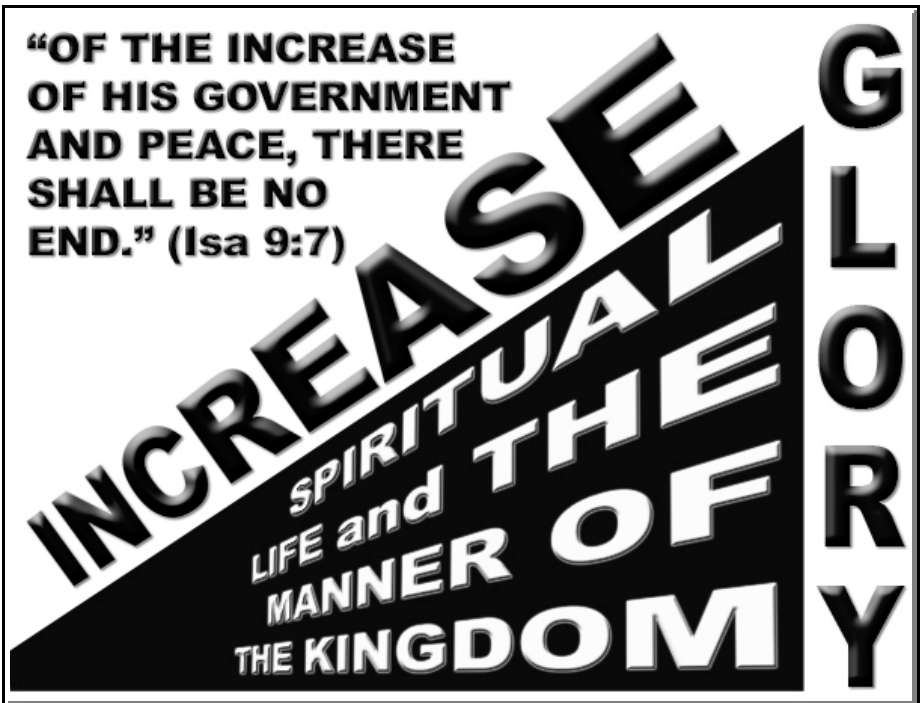
In Christ, the lowest point is the beginning point, as in a race that is being run. From that point, increase is the mode of the Kingdom. This is a point that must be ever set before us, lest we lapse into a carnal way of thinking.

↪ Speaking of those who dwell in the presence of the Lord David wrote, "They go from **strength to strength**,

every one of them in Zion appeareth before God” (Psa 84:7).

- ⇨ Isaiah clearly prophesied this when he spoke of the Kingdom of the Messiah: “Of the **increase** of His government and peace there shall be no end . . . zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isa 9:7).
- ⇨ Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, **it is the greatest among herbs**, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (Mat 13:31-32).
- ⇨ Through Paul, the Spirit said the righteousness of God, which is given to men, is revealed in a process called “**faith to faith**” (Rom 1:17).
- ⇨ Transformation is described as a change “**from one degree of glory to another**”^{RSV} (2 Cor 3:18).
- ⇨ The part of us that is born again – the “inward man” – is described as being “**renewed day by Day**” (2 Cor 4:16).
- ⇨ The aim for every believer is “**That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God**” (Eph 3:17-19).
- ⇨ The maturity of believers is declared to be coming into “**the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ**” (Eph 4:13).
- ⇨ Spiritual growth is described as going “**on unto perfection**” (Heb 6:1).

Any backward motion or retrogression among believers is soundly condemned, for it contradicts the very nature of the Kingdom, dishonors King Jesus, and makes God a liar. Let there be



no question about this, for the Spirit has made it abundantly plain.

- ⇨ “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? **it is thenceforth good for nothing**, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” (Matt 5:13).
- ⇨ “They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and **in time of temptation fall away**” (Luke 8:13).
- ⇨ “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in **departing from the living God**” (Heb 3:12).
- ⇨ “Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man **fall** after the same example of unbelief” (Heb 4:11).
- ⇨ “For when for the time **ye ought to be teachers**, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (Heb 5:12).

- ⇨ “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, **My soul shall have no pleasure in him**. But we are not of them who **draw back unto perdition**; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb 10:38-39).

I know that people have become accustomed to church members who do not grow, failing to advance in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Somehow they have the idea that spiritual growth is more of a luxury than a necessity – something that *may* be required for leaders, but certainly not for the average church member. I cannot begin to tell you the number of professing Christians I have seen and known who are not advancing toward glory. They seem to think they are holding their own, forgetting that we are advancing upwardly, not horizontally.

If a person does not grow in Christ, it is inevitable that they will fall away. That is the exact reason of the sixth chapter of Hebrews. “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection . . . For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the

good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame" (Heb 6:1-6).

It is not possible for spiritual life to be maintained in a static condition. No

person can fail to grow and yet be guaranteed of their acceptance with God. That is because spiritual life must be nourished to continue. Further, when it is nourished, it is its nature to grow.

Our text has exposed us to genuine life in Christ Jesus, and what occurs when people walk in the light, live

by faith, and walk in the Spirit. They cannot be silenced. They will not abandon the work of the Lord. They will resort to the Lord in times of testing. They will be willing to sacrifice in the interest of their brethren. They will not hold tightly to the things of this world. Now, it only remains for each one to examine themselves on these matters.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 2/2/2007. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Twenty-first lesson will cover verses 1 through 11 of the fifth chapter: "THE CASE OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA." This is the first eruption of sin in the body of Christ, which had grown to considerable size. Like the introduction of sin in the Garden, the transgression itself does not appear significant to the flesh. However, the judgment meted out by God confirms how serious it really was. The modern church would do well to labor to take hold of this passage. It reveals the kind of priorities that exist in the Kingdom of Christ. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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