

ACTS

Part 11 – The Word of Encouragement

Acts 4:31-37

Main Idea: The Word of God is the foundation for the unity, fellowship, generosity and boldness of believers. By His Spirit, He draws His people together to be a living testimony to the resurrection of Jesus.

Sandwiched here between persecution from outside the church (Acts 4:18) and a crisis that comes about from inside the church (5:1-11), we have this interlude focusing on fellowship. Much like Acts 2:42-47, we are encouraged by how the believers lived together for the glory of God.

³¹ *And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*

³² *Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.*

- **Fellowship begins with the Holy Spirit.** (v. 31)
 - We start in the passage about the Holy Spirit and His work.
 - They needed Holy Spirit boldness to be in deep, resource sharing fellowship.
- **Fellowship is rooted in the resurrection of Christ.** (v. 31, 32)
 - The word of God points directly to the work of Christ most clearly summed up in His resurrection.
 - “one heart and soul” - *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* (Deuteronomy 6:5)
- **Fellowship is wonderfully communal.** (v. 32)
 - Reiteration of what we saw in Acts 2:42 among this same group of believers.
 - Psalm 133 “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! ... For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.”
 - We cannot clip this fellowship from the moorings of vv. 31 & 33. True fellowship happens within the work of the Spirit (31) and the Word (33).
 - They gave to help others. They gave freely. No one was ordering them to.
 - Holy Spirit wrought generosity so that there would be no need in their midst. They freely gave not from a command from the Apostles, but because of the overflow from their hearts at the goodness of God.
- **Fellowship is intensely personal.** (v. 32)
 - They had a loose grip they had on their stuff.
 - They were selling private property (Acts 5:4). This wasn’t communism or socialism.
 - The Jerusalem church was huge so it follows that they didn’t have to know each other to help another in need.
 - It wasn’t their own. It was the Lord’s. All of it is God’s.

³³ *And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.* ³⁴ *There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold* ³⁵ *and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.*

- **Fellowship begins with the Holy Spirit.** (v. 33)
 - Great power (*dunamis*) (Acts 1:8) in the preaching of the Word leads to the great grace shown in their Spirit infused boldness and generosity.

- **Fellowship is rooted in the resurrection of Christ.** (v. 33)
 - Their testimony focused on the resurrection, not on Jesus as a good teacher, friend or holy confidant.
 - The resurrection of Christ IS our unity. The empty tomb and empty cross are our commonality. The Word that gives testimony to the resurrection of Christ is our focus. Fellowship is a happy by-product.
- **Fellowship is wonderfully communal.** (vv. 34-35)
 - The giving came to the Apostles and then they distributed it.
 - The church shared like they were equals because they were. The cross and resurrection of Christ made them that way.
 - *“But there will be no poor among you; for the Lord will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess.”* (Deuteronomy 15:4)
 - The end of poverty is a promise connect to the Promised Land that Israel hoped for and the new heavens and new earth that we look forward to.
 - Underlying feeling of obligation toward each other
 - *“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”* (Gal. 6:9-10)
- **Fellowship is intensely personal.** (vv. 34-35)
 - Boldness to express need. Boldness to give to the need. Boldness needed to enter into each other's lives.
 - Passivity is a sin. It's really just ignoring a need that you see.
 - Solution: Name it. Repent and move toward engaging the needs you see.
 - The needy shared their need. They didn't keep it secret.
 - We are all need AND we have much to give.
 - There is a difference between passivity and believing that you can save or fix everyone and meet everyone's need on your own. There is only one Savior and that's Jesus. If you are already serving and are feeling conviction from this message please lay that conviction before Christ. Ask Him to give you Holy Spirit wrought discernment and then move forward in wisdom and grace.
 - Ask the question: This material blessing or giftedness is the Lord's. What would He have me do with it?

³⁶Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

- **Fellowship begins with the Holy Spirit.** (v. 36)
 - Encouragement, exhortation, comfort – all sound like what the Holy Spirit does. He is not described as individually having some sort of Holy Spirit filling, but rather acts out the filling described in verse 31.
- **Fellowship is rooted in the resurrection of Christ.** (v. 37)
 - Barnabas' generosity was fueled by the resurrection of Christ and believing in Him only for salvation. If it was not, he would've done what Ananias and Sapphira do.
- **Fellowship is wonderfully communal.** (v. 37)
 - Not protective of his money, he comes and brings what he has from the sale and gives it to the apostles to do with it as they see fit.
- **Fellowship is intensely personal.** (v. 36-37)
 - Historicity: Name: Joseph. Nic-name: Barnabas. Tribe: Levi. From: Cyprus.
 - This puts personal feet on what seems to be just a broad concept. We can often think that “someone else will do it,” but this passage clearly shows us that the broad generosity of the early church was lived out by individuals - specifically Barnabas. If you think someone else will do it, then in all likelihood, no one is meeting the expressed need.