

Lesson 11

They Integrated Everyone in the Body

Acts 2.45-46a

They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts,

Introduction

What did the early church have in common? Answer: their commonality was in things that were uncommon. What united the early church was what set them apart from everything else around them. What brought them together was uncommon in their culture.

For example, it's like Michigan fans in Ohio, who are united, holding in common that which is uncommon, from everybody else, in their devotion to Jim Harbaugh and his fighting Wolverines. A more serious example might also be Christians who worship underground. They are united in secret because what they hold dear is what would lead to their persecution, imprisonment, or death because it is so uncommon.

An Uncommon Foundation

Staying in our Acts 2 text, v. 44 reads: *now all the believers were together and held all things in common.* Later in 4.32 Luke says, *those who believed were of one heart and mind . . . they held everything in common.* Note the key word in both readings: "believers." All of them had believed on Christ for salvation. It was their faith in Jesus uniting them together. This was the basis for their unity . . . not the possessions they shared.

They belonged to each other in Christ

This is demonstrated by the way they shared together. Everyone was fully integrated into the body. All had a part . . . and if *any* had a need . . . those needs were met. Look again at Acts 2.45. See their hearts driven by love in Acts 4.34-35. Consider also what happened decades later in Macedonia when those local churches put funds together to send it to the struggling church in Jerusalem. Paul writes about them here:

I can testify that, according to their ability and even beyond their ability, of their own accord, they begged us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in the ministry to the saints, 2 Corinthians 8.3-4.

Christians exhibit the fruit of their relationship with the Spirit by serving each other. Christians understand that the things they possess are on loan from God. God blesses us so we can bless others. It is our commonality that brings us together. Everyone is integrated into the body.

They related to each other through Christ

What makes the Acts 2 church so noteworthy is the way they began to relate to each other through Christ. He was at the very center of their relationships with each other. He was the foundation, which set them apart. They were coming out of Judaism, with all its rules and practices that they had followed their entire lives and were now leaving those and uniting in their foundation in Christ. This had a profound effect on the way they related to one another. It impacted the way they talked, interacted, and shared with each other.

Let's look at a great example of how we can relate to each other through Christ:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will also share in the comfort, 2 Corinthians 1.3-7.

What is Paul saying, especially in v. 7? When Christ comforts you in your suffering, He is not just doing that for your sake. He does it for you, so that His comfort will overflow from you to someone else. This is the exact opposite of the individualism we may have been raised with that tells us "whatever Christ does in my life, he does it for me." This is not true. Everything Christ does in each of our lives is not just for our sake, but for the sake of the entire body."

The knowledge you are being taught is not intended to stop with you, it is intended to overflow to others ... in other words ... to be shared with others. This is what it means to relate to others through Christ.

Let's go back to the day of Pentecost and think about how the early church was united through the forgiveness they had received. In Christ, they shared in His forgiveness. *How would that impact the way they would relate to each other? How does this affect the way we relate to each other today?*

If we have been forgiven of our sin and that unites us together ... doesn't this radically change the way we relate to each other? What do we do when a brother or sister sins against us? How would the world react? The world often reacts to these situations by isolating the person who did them wrong, treats them differently, and doesn't forget. Some are very proud of their long memories. But for the Christian, this is not the way it should be.

An Uncommon Social Concern

When one is united with Christ, he or she will care for the people of Christ. Acts 2.45 explains how this looks.

They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need.

They shared everything they had, 4.32. There were no needy persons among them, 4.34. What can we learn here?

We need to value people over possessions

This is very difficult for most Americans. We are very blessed. We have so much. We may be apt to hold onto our possessions very tightly. This attitude was not exhibited by the early church. Those who had needs could trust that they would be met. Those who were giving took up the initiative themselves ... with no prodding (that we can tell) from the apostles. These appear to mostly be spontaneous acts of love.

We need to give with no thought of return

This type of giving was unheard of in Greco-Roman culture. While it was very common for people to share things with other people inside their socio-economic class – it was more of a give and take relationship. *I'll help you, but you help me.* This is not the way the first Christians gave. They gave and expected nothing back. It wasn't simply a giving of their resources; it was a surrendering of their rights.

We must follow through:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can such faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, stay warm, and be well fed," but you don't give them what the body needs, what good is it? In the same way faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works, James 2.14-18.

Each of us will be held accountable for the way we use our resources.

An Uncommon Mission

As we read Acts 2.46, we see them unifying through daily interaction with each other. Their togetherness was continuous. They were in each other's homes, breaking bread, praising God, and enjoying the favor of all.

This led to their influence and message being multiplied. Verse 46 mentions their being in the temple ... which is where all their Jewish friends and relatives were who needed the gospel.

While he was holding on to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astonished, ran toward them in what is called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he addressed the people: "Fellow Israelites, why are you amazed at this? Why do you stare at us, as though we had made him walk by our own power or godliness? Acts 3.11-12.

Every time they went to the temple, they were preaching Jesus ... people were being saved ... and the Lord was adding the church daily. When the church is focused on leading people to Christ. It changes our conversations ... it unifies us ... and the mission of God is carried out in a powerful way.

Is our church community a once-a-week routine ... or a day-to-day reality? They were meeting in their homes daily. They were cared for each other's needs daily. They were studying the word of God daily. They were growing in numbers daily. It was all happening on a continual basis. They had not limited the church to two hours each Sunday morning.

The early church was Together ... with everyone integrated into the body.