

# THE BELIEVERS OF THE FIRST CHURCH: ESSENTIALS FOR LIFE TOGETHER ACTS 04:32–37

## *Introduction*

The life of the early believers and church was most unusual — a far cry from the way the church and its believers live today. Yet a study of their lives gives us a clear picture of the essentials for living together and for fulfilling the mission of the Lord.

- I. They were of one heart and mind (v. 32).
- II. They gave a great witness to the resurrection (v. 33).
- III. They took care of all who had need (vv. 34-37).

## **I. Acts 04:32 Brotherhood and Unity**

The early church was of one heart and of one mind. The order of the Greek sentence says, “the heart and the soul [were] one.” The person’s *whole being* was one with all other believers. There was complete and total...

- oneness
- harmony
- unity
- love
- accord

And remember, there were multitudes, thousands of believers at this time (cp. Acts 2:41; 3:4). How in the world can a body of people achieve one heart and one mind, become so unified? This verse reveals how.

1. The early believers gave their heart and mind to Jesus’ Lordship and mission. They believed, *truly* believed, that the Lord Jesus...
  - had died for their sins
  - had risen from the dead
  - had been exalted to the right hand of God
  - had commissioned them to go forth, reaching and helping people
  - was to return and reward believers for being faithful to the great mission of saving and ministering to people

They were thoroughly convinced of the mission of Christ, of the great commission (Acts 1:8; Mt. 28:19-20); therefore, they gave all they were to *speak the Word of God* (vv. 29, 31). Nothing, not even threats and persecution could keep them from proclaiming the Word and carrying out the mission of Christ.

The point is this: they knew Jesus to be the Lord; therefore, they gave their lives to be His *servants* (doulos, slaves). They surrendered themselves totally to the Lordship of Christ...

- to His life and will.
  - to His purpose and mission.
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Christ became their life and will, purpose and mission — their all in all. They lived and existed to do what He said; they did it so that men might be saved from sin, death and hell and receive eternal life. As just said, nothing, not even threats and persecution, could keep them from proclaiming and carrying out the mission of Christ. In fact, opposition only spurred them on with more boldness and energy in their witness (see Acts 4:23-31).

Another way to say the same thing is this: the early believers knew what the Lordship of Christ really meant. It meant the surrender of all one is and has so that the whole world may know that no man need ever die. A man can live eternally, truly live forever, beginning right now. The early believers just could not keep such a glorious message to themselves, no matter what it cost them personally or financially.

2. The early church gave their heart and mind to the Lord's demand, the demand to love and to share everything with the needy. (See *Stewardship, Commitment*, Acts 2:44-45.)

*The early believer did not...*

- insist on owning property
- trust in riches
- glory in possessions (things)
- count his possessions as his own
- take from others
- lay and store up wealth

*The early believer truly believed...*

- in the Lordship of Christ
- in the inheritance of eternal life (heaven)
- in being rewarded for faithfulness to Christ
- in denying self (all one is and has) to be saved
- in forsaking all for Christ
- in loving others sacrificially
- in God's ownership of all

The early church believed they were on earth to serve Christ and were being blessed with material possessions to help others. Therefore, they met the necessities of their own families, then they gave what they had left to meet the needs of a lost, desperate, impoverished world.

Scripture drives the point home: the early church believed...

- that the true believer was to “Work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need” (Eph. 4:28).
- “That in turn their plenty will supply what you need” (2 Cor. 8:14).
- That “He who gathered much did not have too much”(2 Cor. 8:15).
- That “he who gathered little did not have too much” (2 Cor. 8:15).

- that “God [will] put into the heart of [believers] the same concern I have for you” (2 Cor. 8:16).

Note a very practical point, easily seen. Unless the rich use their money to the point of sacrificing, millions will continue to die from senseless causes, causes that could be eliminated by a concentrated effort of the wealthy.

- => The hungry will continue to starve.
- => The cold will continue to freeze.
- => The unclothed will continue to be embarrassed, be misfits.
- => The unsheltered will continue to suffer exposure.
- => The uneducated will continue to be ignorant.
- => The diseased will continue to be eaten away.
- => The abnormal will continue to suffer and be useless.
- => The lost will continue to die without Christ.

There are businessmen and leaders with the ability and know how (under God) to meet the desperate needs of the world. Sorrow, suffering, pain and death could be eliminated by just **some** of the world’s leaders if they would just surrender their lives to Christ — all they *are and have* — and get to it.

A man should never forget this: Jesus said that the rich man lost his soul and went to hell because of indulgence, extravagance, storing, hoarding and neglecting the needs of those in the world who were in such desperate straits. (See notes, Lk. 12:15-19; and *Sin*, Lk. 16:19-21.) There is no hope for the man, no matter what the institutional church and its leaders say — no hope for the man who *holds back* more than what he and his *dear* family need. The reason is simple: the starving child is God’s *dear* child. Let no man think God will excuse him for the death of His *dear* child who starved to death when the man had the money to help. Imagine the scene. A starving child leans against the outside wall of a building. Inside is a man with food or money to help the child. Yet the man refuses to help; he *holds back, stores up, banks, invests* his money to get more and more. All the while, God’s *dear child* starves and starves and dies starving. What is it that confuses the mind of man so much? What is it that blinds man, that causes him to think that he will be acceptable to God and allowed to live in heaven forever? What causes him to think that his sin will be overlooked? God’s *dear* starving child died because of the man’s *holding back*. Christ teaches that there is no way God will excuse the man. The man will be held accountable and judged severely.

Think about this for a moment: If God cares so much about man’s human suffering, how much more does He care about man’s spiritual and eternal suffering? He cared enough to sacrifice His Son for man’s spiritual rebirth. If any man *keeps back* anything when it could be spreading the gospel of eternal life around the world, how

much more punishment does he deserve? Christ teaches that every soul is lost and doomed that does not accept Him. The responsibility to send the gospel around the world lies in the hands of men. God is not going to send any other being to earth to do the job. It is up to men. Men must work to earn a livelihood, but they must also work so they will have enough to meet the needs of the world. In addition, some must be willing to go and become personally involved. This is the only way the needs of the world will ever be met.

Now, for the question asked at the beginning of this point. How in the world can a body of people achieve one heart and one mind, become as unified as the early church did?

=> By giving their minds and hearts, their whole beings to Jesus' Lordship and mission. When men and women surrender to the Lordship of Christ, they become one in following and doing His will. His life and mission become their life and mission. They live the same **kind** of life, the same *style* of life, and they work diligently to achieve the same mission. They become one in life and mission which is to say they become one in everything. There is something else as well, really the most significant factor: when people surrender to the Lordship of Christ, the Spirit of God gives them a supernatural love and a spiritual bond with other believers (see Rom. 5:5; Gal 5:22-23; Jn. 13:34-35. See Fellowship, Acts 2:42.) It is this that creates one heart and one mind in the church.

**John 13:34-35** *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

**Acts 2:42** *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

**Rom 5:5** *And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*

**Rom 12:4-5** *Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

**Eph 4:12-13** *To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

**1 Cor 1:10** *I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.*

## II. *Acts 04: 33 A Witnessing Church*

The early church gave a great witness to the resurrection. (See *Jesus Christ, Resurrection*, Acts 2:24; 2:25-36.) They witnessed with great power and much grace was upon them all (see *Witnessing*, Acts 1:8; see Acts 4:31; *Grace*, Tit. 2:11-15).

## III. *Acts 04:34–37 Ministering to the Needy*

The early church took care of all those who had need. Note four revealing facts that are extremely instructive and challenging. These facts show how obedient the early believers were and just how obedient God expects all believers to be. (As these facts are studied, imagine how different the church would be if believers today reached out like the early believers. What a change would be wrought in the heart of the world!)

1. Fact 1: no one lacked anything. There were “no needy persons among them” (endees), that was left in need or in want, that went without. The idea is that no family, no man, no woman, no child was neglected. No one was *left* without the necessities of life; no one had to face a day without the food, clothing or shelter that he needed to take care of himself or of his dear family. All of God’s dear children were taken care of. Remember a critical question: what was it that caused the believers to take *care* of the needy? It was love — the duty laid upon them by Christ. Christ had told them to love and share with all those who lacked the necessities of life. There was a true brotherhood, a genuine love and caring for each other.
2. Fact 2: all repented of their *hoarding*, and they gave everything beyond their own necessities.
  - => Some possessed lands (estates, plural) they did not need. They sold them and gave the money to meet the needs of others.
  - => Some possessed houses (plural) that were not essential to their necessities. They too sold them and gave the money to meet the needs of others.

Some picture this as saying that people sold the homes in which they lived, as though they moved into the streets or under the stars, exposing their families to all kinds of elements and dangers. This is most unlikely. Where would such a larger crowd of families (over 8,000 at this time) move, live and survive? Shelter or housing is a necessity. Christ said so (Mt. 6:25-34). What the believers were doing is just what Christ demanded:

**Mat 19:21** *Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

**Luke 9:23** *Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

**Luke 14:33** *“In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”*

**Luke 12:33** “Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.”

**1 Tim 6:19** In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

**Psa 24:1** The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

They truly loved Christ, so they were repenting of their *hoarding*, covetousness, and extravagant living. They were focusing upon a world that was full of desperate needs and death.

They truly loved others, so they were giving all they had *beyond their own necessities* to help meet the world’s desperate needs.

3. Fact 3: the needy received only what they needed, only what their necessities were. There are always those among us and around the world who need help, who are not able to take care of themselves. The reasons are innumerable. They are...

- too old
- widowed
- too young
- divorced
- diseased
- oppressed
- injured
- unemployed
- broken-hearted
- unskilled
- orphaned
- uneducated

What the early church did was very simple.

⇒ They looked at all those around them and pinpointed the needs.

⇒ They repented of their *hoarding* and gave to those who had need.

⇒ They gave only what the necessities were.

**Mat 6:33** “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

**John 6:12** When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”

4. Fact 4: one man in particular set a godly example Barnabas. (See *Barnabas*, Acts 4:36-37.) ■

### ACTS 04:36–37 BARNABAS

*Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet. Acts 04:36–37*

This is the first mention of Barnabas, the Levite, who was from the Island of Cyprus. His name means “Son of exhortation” or “Son of consolation.” Barnabas was an extremely important person in the life of the early church. His life is a dynamic example to all.

- => He was gifted by the Spirit of God with the gift of an *apostle* (Acts 14:14; see Eph. 4:11).
- => He was totally committed to Christ and to helping others, even to the point of selling land to help (Acts 4:36-37).
- => He stood up and defended Paul before the early believers who feared Paul because Paul had been a spy and had persecuted the church (Acts 9:26-27).
- => He was sent forth by the church to exhort believers in the first known Gentile church, Antioch (Acts 11:22f).
- => He sought after Paul, wanting Paul to serve as his associate, and he disciplined Paul in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).
- => He served with Paul (Acts 11:30; 12:25; 13:2-15:40).
- => He was one of the first two missionaries, Paul being the other (Acts 13:2-3).
- => He disciplined John Mark (Acts 12:25; 15:37-40).
- => He was called upon to defend Gentile salvation before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:2, 12).
- => He differed and split with Paul (Acts 15:36-40).
- => He backslid, drifted away for a brief period (Gal 2:11-13).
- => He is mentioned as an example by Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:6).
- => He was a cousin to John Mark (Col. 4:10). □

















