

31.08.2019 MINISTRY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. James 1:27

Pentecost heralded the coming of the Holy Spirit in power upon spiritual Israel – the Church. This day marked the birth of the New Testament church and it occurred because Christ was exalted to the right hand of the Father. The Church was to carry out the mission of the Jesus to the world, in the power of the Spirit.

A New Community of Believers

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine (teaching) and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Acts 2:42

Here we find 4 things the early church was committed to ('*they continued steadfastly*') under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In addition to teaching, breaking bread and prayer, one of the hallmarks of the early church was fellowship (Greek: *koinonia* – *fellowship, communion*).

When the Spirit comes at conversion, He fills our hearts with God's *agape*' love. It is only this love that brings true fellowship. We have fellowship with the Godhead and we have fellowship with our brothers and sisters in the faith. See 1 Corinthians 1:9, 2 Corinthians 13:14, Philippians 1:5; 2:1.

That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:3

This fellowship was not only a spiritual fellowship; it manifested itself in care for one another.

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. Acts 2:44, 45

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. Acts 4:34, 35

When the numbers increased, deacons were appointed to look after the needs of the poor (Acts 6:1-4).

In doing this, the church was fulfilling God's will for His people as laid down in Old Testament times:

For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.' Deuteronomy 15:11

Dorcas: Acts 9:36-41

Dorcas, a woman known and loved for her works of charity to the poor, was a believer who lived in Joppa.

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died... And all the widows stood by Peter, weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. Acts 9:36-39

In Dorcas Luke gives us a model of Christian charity to the marginalized in society. Then orphans and widows were the most economically vulnerable (Lk 20:47). No government safety net was there to catch them. And today too, Christians must bring as much "shalom" as possible to those on the margins. *IVP Bible Commentary: Acts*

For Reflection:

If you are called to leave the place that you serve now, what will be your legacy? Will you be remembered for your love, your Spirit-filled works and charitable deeds?

True Giving

Giving in the New Testament was not based upon percentages. Christians were asked to consider Christ's gift and then give as Christ gave. Christians were to recognise that they were not their own, but bought with the price of the precious blood of Jesus and give cheerfully according to the measure of the gift they had been given. Their giving was to be the consequence of their giving of themselves whole-heartedly to God.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" John 3:16

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9

*Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction **the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.** 2 Corinthians 8:1-5*

*He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. **So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.** 2 Corinthians 9:6-8*

For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men. 2 Corinthians 9:12, 13

'Even the very poor should bring their offerings to God. They are to be sharers of the grace of Christ by denying self to help those whose need is more pressing than their own. The poor man's gift, the fruit of self-denial, comes up before God as fragrant incense. And every act of self-sacrifice strengthens the spirit of beneficence in the giver's heart, allying him more closely to the One who was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich... Spiritual prosperity is closely bound up with Christian liberality. The followers of Christ should rejoice in the privilege of revealing in their lives the beneficence of their Redeemer. As they give to the Lord they have the assurance that their treasure is going before them to the heavenly courts. Would men make their property secure? Let them place it in the hands that bear the marks of the crucifixion. Would they enjoy their substance? Let them use it to bless the needy and suffering.' *Acts of the Apostles: p 341, 345*

Paul's Guide to Living and Loving Well: Romans 12

In this chapter, Paul tells believers the result of the outworking of the good news of the gospel: the Christian will **have nothing to do with the world; its principles, its behaviours and its passions.** Paul writes these exhortations in the present tense, as imperatives; he describes an ongoing process. **Instead, the Christian who has been transformed and has the mind of Christ, will seek (like Christ) to do only that which pleases God – to do His perfect will. This will be manifested in deeds of love and compassion to all.**

Therefore, brethren, I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12:1, 2

Romans 12:3-8 – we are to serve God with spiritual gifts; the gifts of the Spirit.

Romans 12:9-21 - Our Responsibility to our fellow-men is to allow the Spirit to demonstrate the love of God in our lives.

- Our relationships in the church must be based on love: Romans 12:9-16
Paul lists 12 qualities God's people will exhibit: *sincerity, discernment, affection, honour, enthusiasm, patience, generosity, hospitality, good-will, sympathy, harmony and humility.*
- Our relationship to our enemies: Service, rather than Revenge: Romans 12: 17-21
Revenge is forbidden by God. A Christian is called instead to bless his enemies (verse 14), do what is right and live in peace (verse 17, 18), serve our enemies (verses 19, 20) and overcome evil with good (verse 21).

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Romans 12:9-13

James 'the Just'

James reminds believers that the life of faith is revealed to the world by deeds of love and service. Our private personal relationship with God (or lack of it) is made visible to all by our works. Only God knows our hearts. Men and women judge us by our deeds. We are indeed a witness to the universe.

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful... we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2, 9

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. James 1:21, 22

If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. James 1:26, 27

Beware of showing Partiality – James 2:1-9

In the Judgment, God will condemn the Rich who have oppressed the Poor – James 5:1-5

True faith, the faith that receives the righteousness of Christ and surrenders to the work of the Holy Spirit will result in the works of the Spirit; in deeds of love and kindness.

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. James 2:14-17

'All who have been born into the heavenly family are in a special sense the brethren of our Lord. The love of Christ binds together the members of His family, and wherever that love is made manifest there the divine relationship is revealed. "Everyone that loves is born of God, and knows God." 1 John 4:7. Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may

have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. Through the influence of the divine Spirit they have been a blessing to those about them... **The Saviour has given His precious life in order to establish a church capable of caring for sorrowful, tempted souls.** A company of believers may be poor, uneducated, and unknown; yet in Christ they may do a work in the home, the neighbourhood, the church, and even in "the regions beyond," whose results shall be as far-reaching as eternity.

It is because this work is neglected that so many young disciples never advance beyond the mere alphabet of Christian experience. The light which was glowing in their own hearts when Jesus spoke to them, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," they might have kept alive by helping those in need. The restless energy that is so often a source of danger to the young might be directed into channels through which it would flow out in streams of blessing. Self would be forgotten in earnest work to do others good.

Those who minister to others will be ministered unto by the Chief Shepherd. They themselves will drink of the living water, and will be satisfied... **Love to man is the earthward manifestation of the love of God. It was to implant this love, to make us children of one family that the King of glory became one with us. And when His parting words are fulfilled, "Love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12); when we love the world as He has loved it, then for us His mission is accomplished. We are fitted for heaven; for we have heaven in our hearts.'** *Desire of Ages: p 638-641*
