

Are We One Yet? – July 3, 2016
By Wayne J. Schneider – Soli Deo Gloria

Are we One yet?

Acts 4:32-35

A man came home from work and found his three children on the front porch. He asked them what they were doing. “We are playing church,” they said. “We have just finished worship and now we are out here smoking!”

Do you ever wonder what other people see when they look at the church? Sometimes, I think I don’t want to know. It might be that those on the outside see the church universal in a less favorable way than we view ourselves.

Our passage in the Book of Acts speaks of the church in Jerusalem. This may be the best model for believers to adopt. We can learn from this group of fellow “Jesus followers.”

These believers were motivated. They experienced a union with the Holy Spirit and their lives demonstrate spiritual force. Their lives are focused and they are resolved to be Jesus followers. The witness to their strength of character is their boldness. Verse 4:33 tells us that this church witnessed “with great power.” “Boldness in testimony” is the core of the first half of the Book of Acts.

When the church today is set beside the 1st century church at Jerusalem, it is a bleak comparison. Many believers feel awkward when it comes to sharing their faith today. This, and other reasons, may be the cause of the church’s decline in America.

St. Luke says that another example of their boldness is in the excellency of their fellowship. “They were of one heart and soul” and everyone pooled what they had with each other. This pretty much flies in the face of America’s ‘individualistic, pleasure-seeking, me-first society.’ When we are emotionally isolated from other people the very protection we need against stress—close and endearing relationships—is weakened. I

think the main emotional crisis in America, is a pervasive personal detachment from other people.

A Jewish tale tells of two brothers who were presented a farm by inheritance. They agreed to farm the land together and divide the harvest in half. One brother became married and had children; the other remained single.

The unmarried brother realized his married brother had more responsibilities than he did, and felt that the split was unbalanced. The married brother appreciated that his brother had no one to care for him in his old age, and felt the split was unfair.

And so, every night each brother would sneak out of his barn and carrying some bags of grain, and empty them in the other brother's barn. One night the brothers unintentionally banged into each other, and ended up in a heap in each others arms. And a gentle rain was felt, the rain of God's tears of joy.

There must have been something that happened to this "Fellowship of Believers," these followers of Jesus, because they were not living the kind of life they had previously, before being bound to Jesus by the Holy Spirit. What could it have been? They were fulfilling the prayer of Jesus from St. John chapter 17, where Jesus said that his followers would "Become completely one," (v. 23) and that they would experience lives filled with joy.

For American Christians, spiritual unity is not an urgent matter. If you find that difficult to believe, you only have to consider last month's Annual Conference, or May's General Conference. Western Americans especially, see individualism as a goal and religion a private affair. The contemporary church has even developed some interesting metaphors that undergird this belief. For example, there is the 'gas station' metaphor, where the church is the place you go to get your spiritual fuel for the week

The New Testament has a different take on the church. It defines the church communally not individually. The church is to be mission oriented. We are to be together in this mission. Division hurts. It weakens the mission. Division is a marker that followers

of Jesus are not living like Jesus, and therefore have little credibility.

The initial mission of the church is to craft a loving, selfless, and united community in a divided world. If this is not experienced, it is not yet a church. Harmony and community are essentials, not extras or add-ons. The church must always practice mercy and reconciliation.

The Jerusalem church directs us. These followers of Jesus simply loved their neighbors as much as they loved themselves. It is not a pipe dream to consider that such a church can be experienced today. Jesus is alive. The power of the Holy Spirit is still available. God's love is the same. A new Godly 21st century outbreak is possible. God is only waiting for us. Alleluia. Amen.