

An Analysis of a Christian Community
In Pasadena, California
On the basis of Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION 3

 The Problem
 Purpose of the Thesis
 Organization of the Thesis

II. EXEGESIS OF ACTS 2:44-47 AND 4:32-37 5

 Acts 2:44-47
 Acts 4:32-37
 Summary of Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37
 Conclusion

III. PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN INTERACTION IN ACTS 2:44-47 AND 4:32-37 IN
RELATION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT 9

 Introduction
 Unity Among Believers
 Sacrifice by Believers for One Another
 Assembly and Worship of Believers
 Clustering of Believers
 The Corporate Witness of Believers to the World
 Conclusions

IV. THE PASADENA CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY 17

 Introduction
 Background
 Analysis

V. CONCLUSION 24

Chapter I

Introduction

The Problem

Christian community has been a topic of growing interest over the past few years. Such diverse notables as Francis Schaeffer and Dietrich Bonhoeffer have written on and participated in Christian community.¹ Sojourners magazine is the outgrowth of a group of Christian students who banded together to form a community.² The charismatic movement has begun to emphasize the concept of Christian community.³ And certain recent cults are incorporating the idea of community into their structures.⁴

Christian communities, however, vary widely in their approaches as to how people should live together. Some communities require their members to divest themselves of all personal possessions and pool them in a common fund. Others maintain that property should be held by individual members. Some share their homes with one another, while others have their separate homes near each other. Some see themselves as a church. Others see their community as only a part of a larger church. Some are highly structured, while others are loosely organized.

This thesis is an attempt to evaluate a community on North MarVista Avenue in Pasadena, California. The community began in 1970 with one couple. Within the course of six years six couples from the same church moved onto the same block along with four single men.

There is a general agreement among those participating in Christian community that Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37 represent Christian community at its best and should be used as the basis for evaluation. Typical of this viewpoint are Dave and Neta Jackson who write: "We are speaking of returning to the original dynamic relationship between Christians that characterized the early church described in the first part of Acts."⁵

Purpose of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to compare Christian Community in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37 with the Christian community in Pasadena to see whether the concept of community is a viable alternative for Christians today. This process will include an exegesis of Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37. Then various Biblical principles concerning how Christians are to relate with one another and to non-Christians will be developed and illustrated in the rest of the New Testament. On this basis the Christian community in Pasadena will be analyzed through observation and interviews.

With respect to this thesis, the following working definition of Christian community will be assumed: Christian community is any group of people who have put their faith in Christ for forgiveness of sins, who live in the same geographical proximity, and who have some type of social interaction.⁶

¹ Francis A Schaeffer, The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century (Downers Grove, IL.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, A Discussion of Christian Fellowship (New York: Harper & Row, 1954).

² Sojourners (published monthly, Washington, D.C.).

³ See e.g. John Gunstone's Living Together, The Warm and Candid Story of one Man's Experience in a Christian Community (Minneapolis: Dimension Books, 1976) and Michael Harper's A New Way of Living, How the church of the Redeemer, Houston, Found a New Life-Style (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1973).

⁴ Ronald Enroth's book, Youth, Brainwashing, and the Extremist Cults (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1977) Discusses seven cults.

⁵ Dave and Neta Jackson, Living Together in a World Falling Apart (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1974), p. 47.

⁶ The author has based this definition on the work of George A. Hillery who has classified no less than ninety-four different definitions of community. He found that all of these definitions shared three basic elements: common beliefs, common geography, and social interaction, George A. Hillery, Jr., "Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement," Rural Sociology 20 (1995):113.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter two will deal with the exegesis of Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37. Chapter three will develop Biblical principles of Christian interaction from Acts 2 and 4 and illustrate these principles in the rest of the New Testament. Chapter four will analyze the Pasadena Christian community in the light of the way the Christians in Acts implemented the New Testament principles. And finally Chapter five will give concluding remarks.

Chapter II

Exegesis of Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37

Acts 2:44-47

Context

Acts 2:44-47 records the state of affairs that existed in the church immediately following the day of Pentecost. Prior to that time the apostles had been waiting in Jerusalem. Then on the day of Pentecost they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and Peter gave a bold sermon which resulted in three thousand being saved.

Exegetical Outline

- 1) The first believers in Jerusalem had a common locale. (2:44 a)
- 2) The first believers in Jerusalem regarded their possessions as common property. (2:44b-45)
 - a) They would sell their property and possessions. (2:45 a)
 - b) They would share the proceeds with whoever had need. (2:45b)
- 3) The believers had common worship and fellowship. (2:46-47a)
 - a) The first believers in Jerusalem had a common daily worship time. (2:46a)
 - b) The first believers in Jerusalem had a common daily mealtime. (2:46b)
 - c) The first believers in Jerusalem had a common praise to God (2:47a)
- 4) The first believers in Jerusalem had a common praise from men. (2:47b)
- 5) The first believers in Jerusalem were multiplying together daily. (2:47c)

Exegetical Idea

The common life of the first believers in Jerusalem was exhibited in their geography, possessions, worship, fellowship, and witness.

Commentary

Verse 44. The phrase *ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ* refers primarily to place, not merely to unity of spirit alone.⁷ Unity of spirit is expressed fully in verse 46 by *ομοθυμαδόν*. The phrase in verse 44 occurs four more times in Acts. Two of those times it definitely refers to place. It also occurs in Luke 17:35 and expresses the idea of place. The phrase is used to answer the question “where” and should be translated in this particular case “in the same place.”⁸ This translation better explains how they could have daily fellowship and share meals as well as possessions. It does not necessarily mean, however, that they were living in the same building. The phrase could be taken in a looser sense, perhaps referring to one of the four quarters of Jerusalem. The phrase *εἶχον ἀπαντὰ κοινὰ* refers to one aspect of the *κοινωνία* of verse 42. The word *εἶχον* can be translated “consider, look upon, view”⁹ when it is followed by the accusative as object and it should be so translated here in view of Acts 5:4 where personal property still exists. Hence, the phrase “had all things in common” is used by Luke to describe the attitude the Christians had toward their personal possessions. They still retained full control of their individual property after becoming Christians but regarded their own property as common to all. This attitude of having all things in common is further explained by verse 45.

⁷ Contra Calvin and Harrison, et. al. John Calvin, Commentary Upon Acts of the Apostles, ed. Henry Beveridge from the original English translation of Christopher Fetherstone, (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1844):180; Everett F. Harrison, Acts: The Expanding Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 66.

⁸ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 4th rev. ed., s.v. “ἐπι,” p. 288.

⁹ Bauer, Lexicon, s.v. “εξω,” p.333.

Verse 45. The *καί* is explicative. It introduces the explanation of how they had all things in common. The two imperfects *επιπρασκον* and *διεμεριζον* coupled with the *αν* in the relative clause indicate a recurring act.¹⁰ The *αν* indicates that the action of selling and distributing was dependant on the need arising.¹¹ The sense is “Whenever a need arose... they would sell... they would distribute.” The accusatives *κτηματα* and *υπαρξεις* refer to property and possessions respectively. The imperfect *διεμεριζον* means “share” here. This is the same word used in Luke 22:17 where Jesus commands His disciples to share the cup among themselves. This word implies a partaking of something with others. The preposition *καθοτι* indicates that the selling of property was contingent on the need of the people: “to the degree that” anyone had need. It occurs in this sense only here and in 4:35.

Verse 46. The phrase *καθ ημεραν* is distributive, “day by day.” It indicates daily activity. The phrase occurs again in the next verse with the same sense. The participle *προσκαρτερουντες* means either to persevere in something or to be busily engaged in something. This is probably a reference to prayer in the temple (compare Acts 1:14; 6:4) and so the latter meaning is more appropriate. The words *κλωντες αρτον* signify some sort of meal, possibly religious, though not enough information is given to determine that. There were definitely religious overtones, though, (v.47) and we probably see here the origins of the love feast. The distributive use of *κατα* appears again in the phrase *κατ οικον*. Here the sense is “from house to house.” The datives *αγαλλιασει* and *αφελοτητε* indicate the manner in which the meals were eaten.

Verse 47. By *χαριν* a passive sense is meant, signifying the favor or grace which one wins from another. Here it implies winning someone’s respect.¹² *λαον* refers to the crowd as opposed to the leaders of Israel who were trying to suppress the movement. The extent of the favor that the Christians gained from the crowd is indicated by *ολον*. The participle *σωζομενους* is descriptive as well as interactive¹³ and shows the absence of time.¹⁴ The verb *προσετιθει* is again an interactive imperfect: “kept on adding.” The words *καθ ημεραν* referred to above indicate that the adding was a daily occurrence. The phrase *επι το αυτο* is rather obtuse in this passage. This could be geographical reference indicating a growing community or it could simply represent a numerical increase in the group.

Summary

Those who came to believe after Peter’s sermon were centralized in one area in Jerusalem. They maintained their own personal possessions, but each individual considered their own personal possessions as open to everyone’s use so that whenever a need arose someone would sell his property and/or possessions and share proceeds with the person or people who were in need. They were daily going to the temple and eating their meals together in the various homes with great joy and praise to God. As a result of these actions they won the approval of the general population. Finally, they increased daily as the Lord added to them those who were being saved.

Acts 4:32-37

Context

An indefinite amount of time has passed since the day of Pentecost. A great miracle of healing has occurred through Peter and consequently five thousand men have been saved. The total number of Christians in Jerusalem is now over eight thousand.

¹⁰ Horation B. Hackett, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, ed. Alvah Hovey (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1882), p. 56.

¹¹ Bauer, Lexicon, s.v. “αν,” p. 47.

¹² Ibid., s.v. “ζαρτις,” p.885

¹³ A.T. Robertson, A Grammer of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), p. 891

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 1115.

Exegetical Outline

- 1) The congregation was united. (v.32)
 - a) They were of one heart and soul. (v. 32a)
 - b) All things were common property to them. (v. 32d)
 - i) They had personal property. (v.32c)
 - ii) They did not claim their personal property as their own. (v. 32b)
- 2) The congregation was being blessed by God. (vv. 33-37)
 - a) God was blessing the apostles with great power. (v. 33a)
 - b) God was blessing them all with abundant grace. (vv. 33b-37)
 - i) God was blessing them with abundant grace because they were caring for the needy. (vv. 34a-35)
 - (1) They cared for the needy by selling land or homes (v. 34b)
 - (2) They cared for the needy by giving the money to the apostles. (v. 35a)
 - (3) They cared for the needy by distributing the money to them. (v. 35b)
 - (4) Barnabas is an example of one who cared for the needs of the poor. (vv. 36-37)

Exegetical Idea

The congregation was united and blessed by God because they were providing for their needy by sacrificing for them.

Commentary

Verse 32. The phrase καρδια και φυχη μια is an expression of supreme unity. The και is explicative telling how they were of one heart and soul. The word υπαρχοντων is substantive: “the things belonging to him.” In the next phrase, ιδιον is the opposite of κοινα. This word ιδιον should be translated “his alone,” “only his.” The whole phrase should be rendered “neither did anyone say that the things belonging to him were his alone.” The participle αλλ is a strong adversative emphasizing the contrast between ιδιον and κοινα.

Verse 33. The word απεδιδουν is interactive: “kept giving witness.” In this context, μεγαλη is the dative of manner, parallel to the second μεγαλη and it seems to refer to divine favor similar to the power mentioned earlier.

Verse 34. The reason for the great grace being upon them is indicated by γαρ. The εν indicates that the statement is limited to the Christians. Alexander thinks that οσοι does not necessarily mean all.¹⁵ But it is hard to get around the inclusive nature of this word, particularly since verse 33 emphasizes the fact that not one of them was claiming anything belonging to him was his alone. The word εφερον is another imperfect: “They would bring.”

Verse 35. The imperfect επιθουν is iterative, parallel to εφερον above. The phrase τουσ ποδασ των signifies the relinquishing of the rights of ownership. The verb διεδιδετο is imperfect passive. The substantive εκαστω is modified by the phrase immediately following it. It means “each one who had a need.” The money was distributed to only those who had need. The phrase καθοτι αν...κ.τ.λ. is exactly parallel to that which appears in 2:45.

Verse 36. The name Βαρναβασ is said to be translated by the words υιοσ παρακλησεωσ. The name probably means “Son of exhortation” rather than “Son of encouragement.”¹⁶ The phrase κυπριοσ τω γενει is renders “a Cyprian by birth.” It does not say why he came to Jerusalem. Perhaps he was one of the pilgrims who was saved at Pentecost.

Verse 37. The word αγρου indicates a large tract of land used for agriculture. This sale of land was a significant sacrifice. The aorist active participle πωλησασ along with the aorist active verbs ηνεγκεν and εθηκεν are used because a single definite act is in view.

¹⁵ Joseph Addison Alexander, The Acts of the Apostles Explained, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1860), 1:176.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 176.

Summary

The multitude of believers were closely united, and did not consider their possessions as theirs alone, but openly shared them with the others. During this time the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection. Divine favor was given to them because they were providing for the needs of the poor believers among them by selling their property and homes, entrusting the proceeds to the apostles, who would then distribute them to whoever had need. One such example was Barnabas who sold a tract of land and entrusted it to the apostles.

Summary of Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37

Acts 2:44-47 records a more primitive state of community than Acts 4:32-37. Acts 2 seems to indicate that the Christians sold their property and gave it directly to those who were in need while in Acts 4 the Apostles played an intermediary role. This does not, however, rule out private acts of giving between two individuals in Acts 4. Acts 2 concerns itself with both property and possessions of every kind while Acts 4 is concerned only with large gifts.

Conclusions

The Christians were grouped together and had daily fellowship and social interaction. There was not an absolute communism. Individual property was maintained but regarded by its owners as available to any who might have need. When the needs arose, the property was voluntarily sold and the proceeds were given to meet those needs. The Christians interacted with each other socially and spiritually by taking their meals together from house to house and worshiping together in the temple. They had the respect and admiration of their non-Christian contemporaries, and this drew many to a saving faith in Christ. In all of this the Christians were united spiritually, emotionally, socially, geographically, and economically.

Chapter III

Principles of Christian Interaction In Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37 In Relation to the New Testament

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate various principles found in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37 with other New Testament literature so that a basis can be formed for analyzing the Christian community in Pasadena, California. The principles to be illustrated from Acts 2 and 4 are under five headings: Unity Among Believers, Sacrifice by Believers for One Another, Assembly and Worship of Believers, Clustering of Believers, and The Corporate Witness of Believers to the World.¹⁷

First the principles will be discussed as they appear in Acts 2 and 4. Then they will be illustrated in other New Testament literature. And finally, a summary of each section will be given.

Unity Among Believers

Unity in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-32

The believers in Acts 2 and 4 were unified on several different levels: the spiritual, the social, the emotional, the economical, and the geographical. Acts 2:46 demonstrates their spiritual unity: "continuing with one mind in the temple" (compare verse 42). The same verse demonstrates their social unity: they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart." Acts 4:32 demonstrates their emotional unity: "And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul." Acts 2:45 and 4:3 demonstrate their economic unity: "and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might need;" ". ..and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them." And finally, Acts 2: 44 demonstrates their geographical unity: "And all those who had believed were together. ..."

Unity Illustrated in Other New Testament Literature

It is interesting to note that the birth of the Jerusalem church occurred less than two months after Christ prayed for unity in His high priestly prayer in John 17. In view of the extent of the unity evidenced and of the fact that these believers were the first to believe through the testimony of the apostles, it seems that the passages in Acts 2 and 4 represent a direct answer to that prayer.

Unity is of great importance to Christ in His prayer in John 17. In the first five verses, Christ prays for himself, that the Father will glorify Him. In verses six through nineteen, Christ prays for the disciples and in verses twenty through twenty-six, Christ prays for those who will believe in Him through the disciples' word. In verse eleven, where Christ is praying for the disciples, Christ asks the Father to "keep them in Thy name...that they may be one, even as We are." This request is repeated in verses twenty through twenty-six for those who would believe on the basis of the disciples witness. This time, however, the request receives much greater emphasis for it is repeated three times. In verse twenty-one Christ prays "that they may be one." Again in verse twenty-two Christ prays "that they may be one." And finally, in verse twenty-three, Christ prays "that they may be perfected in unity," literally, "into a unit." The purpose of this unity is stated in verse twenty-one: "that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me."

Other passages in the New Testament help define more clearly what is meant by unity. Positively, I Peter 3:8; Philippians 2:2; and I Corinthians 1:10 describe unity in terms of harmony, union, and agreement. Negatively, I Corinthians 1:10; 12:25; and James 3:13-18 exclude from unity, among other

¹⁷ For a description of the process by which these principles were arrived at, as well as a chart giving an overview of their illustration in the rest of the New Testament, see Appendix A.

things, partiality, divisions, jealousy and selfish ambition. In addition, Romans 12:16; 15:6; and I Corinthians 12:25 state that individuals must “be of the same mind toward one another” and “have the same care for one another.” Corporate unity results when individuals share common attitudes (Phil. 1:27, 2:2, I Cor. 1:10, Rom. 15:5), common emotions (I Peter 3:8, Phil. 2:2; Rom. 12:16), common goals (Phil. 1:27; 2:2), common judgments (I Cor. 1:10), and common worship (Rom. 15:5-6).

Summary

The unity in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37 is foreshadowed in John 17. Here it is seen that unity is of primary importance to Christ. He prays for it and it is the natural outcome of the glory He shares with believers and of the presence of Christ in believers. Christian unity is based upon the reciprocal relationship that the Father and Son have with each other.

Unity among believers is manifested by the presence of harmony and the lack of strife. It includes the levels of attitudes, emotions, goals, judgments, and worship.

Sacrifice by Believers for One Another

Sacrifice in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37

The juxtaposition of Acts 2:44-47 with Peter’s sermon makes it evident that the sacrifices of the early Christians described in Acts 2 and 4 was a direct response to their realization of all Christ has sacrificed on their behalf. They had been “pierced to the heart” when Peter had spoken to them of Christ’s death and resurrection. Their natural response after having believed was to imitate their Lord. Their sacrifice was a physical act of selling property and possessions to meet the needs of others that arose from time to time. Their sacrifice was need oriented and not simply sacrifice for sacrifice’s sake as seen in 4:35. Their sacrifice was entirely voluntary and self-initiating according to 2:44. Those who possessed property considered their property as common to all and hence there was equality as is portrayed in 2:44 and 4:32. There is no record of coveting prior to Ananias and Sapphira, but when it does occur, it is dealt with immediately (see Acts 5:1-11). The Christians seemed to delight in the act of sacrifice for one another according to 4:33b-34.

The question has been raised as to how those who sold their property supported themselves. Says Lyman Abbot, “Observe the implication that the rich did not give everything away, for then they themselves would have lived in want.”¹⁸ Lenski concurs with this statement along with Ramsay who states

A form of charity which swelled the number of the destitute by producing a large number of voluntary paupers, would be inconsistent with the spirit of the narrative.¹⁹

Sacrifice Illustrated in Other New Testament Passages

The passage that states the basis for sacrifice by believers for each other most succinctly is I John 3:16-18. In verse sixteen, John says that the Christian knows love by means of Christ’s sacrifice of himself on the cross. The key to the verse is the $\kappa\alpha\iota$, for here John draws the corollary that Christians ought also to lay down their lives for one another. The basis of sacrifice by Christians for one another is the death of Christ on the cross for them. John is saying that Christ’s death reveals what true love really is, and a perception of the magnitude of this love for himself should bring the Christian to the point of making a sacrificial offering of himself for his brothers in Christ.

In Philippians 2:3-8 Paul states that the interests of other Christians are to be regarded as more important than one’s own. As with John, Paul states that the basis for this attitude of selflessness is the attitude Christ had in His obedience “to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Again in Acts 20:33-35 there is a repetition of the basic idea in Philippians 2 that the Christian is to be concerned with the needs of others. The practical way in which Paul went about fulfilling this ideal

¹⁸ Lyman Abbot, An Illustrated Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1876) Vol. 4: p. 64.

¹⁹ Sir William M. Ramsay, Pictures of the Apostolic Church, Its Life and Teaching (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910).

illustrates more principles of sacrifice. Paul met his own needs as well as the needs of those who were around him. Hence, the process of sacrifice does not imply becoming a burden to others. I Timothy 5:8 states that it is the Christian's responsibility to provide for his own dependants and II Thessalonians 3:12 commands Christians to be self-supporting. Christians are to meet their own legitimate necessities in order to be capable of meeting the needs of others as well: "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me" (Acts 20:34). This type of sacrifice involves hard work and is directed towards helping the weak (Acts 20:35)

Acts 20:33-35 goes on to state that giving is preferable to receiving (v. 35). More blessing comes from giving than from receiving. The Christian is to strive to be capable of giving, rather than be content with receiving. Thus, Paul commands the thief in Ephesians 4:28 to work with his hands "in order that he may have something to share with him who has need."

II Corinthians 8:1-15 states the motivation for sacrifice. In verses seven and eight Paul states that sacrifice is to be a voluntary offering motivated by love and not obligation (Acts 20:35). A prime example of this type of sacrifice is given by Paul in verses one through five where he describes the Macedonians as giving "in the great ordeal of affliction which overflowed in the wealth of their liberality."

Again verse nine gives Christ's humiliation and death as the basis for this type of sacrifice: "...Though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

II Corinthians 8:1-15 also gives the purpose of sacrifice by Christians for each other. This purpose is stated twice in two consecutive verses, verses thirteen and fourteen.

For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality---at this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality.

Sacrifice isn't so that some may have it easy while those sacrificing have it difficult, but that both the receiver and the giver might be equal.

The presence of one or more Christians who desire to "give rather than receive" opens the way for abuse and Paul deals with this problem in II Thessalonians 3:6-15. The report had come to Paul that some of the Thessalonians were taking advantage of the generosity of others and were "leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies" (I Thess. 3:11). Paul's response to these people provides more insight into the concept of sacrifice.

In a similar vein to Acts 20:34-35, Paul states that the Christian is to avoid being an unnecessary financial burden to his brothers. He calls his own example to their minds and, in words similar to I Thessalonians 2:9, says

... Nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you...in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example.

Paul goes on to say that if someone will not work, he is not to be allowed to eat. That is, he must be forced to provide for himself.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who, rather than become dependant on the body of believers, become dependant on their own riches. Paul addresses himself to wealthy believers in I Timothy 6:17-19. Paul expresses the way they are to sacrifice in a fourfold command in verse eighteen: "Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share..."

Other passages bearing on the concept of sacrifice are Romans 12:13, where a Christian is to contribute "to the needs of the saints;" I Timothy 5:10, giving the requirement of service and sacrifice for approved widows; and Titus 3:14, where "good deeds" are for the purpose of meeting pressing needs.

Summary

The sacrifice in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37 is well illustrated in the rest of the New Testament. Christians sacrifice for one another because of Christ's sacrifice for them. Sacrifice involves, among other things, relinquishing physical goods to meet the needs of a brother. Individual Christians are to regard the needs of others as more important than their own. Sacrifice is to be voluntary and motivated by love. The

goal of sacrifice is equality. Christians are to meet their own needs so that they do not become dependent on others. Giving is more desirable than receiving. Those who refuse to work should not eat. And wealthy people are to be generous.

Assembly and Worship of Believers

Assembly and Worship of Believers in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37

The extent to which the believers in Acts 2 and 4 assembled together is indicated by the phrase “day by day” in 2:46. They were making daily prayers in the temple and meeting together in smaller groups in the various houses.

The adverb *αγαλλιασει* in Acts 2:46 refers to exultation or joy. It is used frequently by the LXX in the Psalms and occurs especially in messianic contexts.¹ The gladness in this passage, then, seems to be the product of a recognition of the Christian’s long awaited Messiah. The natural result of such exultation was praise to God as seen in verse forty-seven. There is no record of singing nor of how long this attitude of gladness and praise lasted. But it is evident from 4:32 that the praise was done with a unified spirit. Prayer is not mentioned in these passages, but is alluded to in 2:42.

Assembly and Worship Illustrated in Other New Testament Passages

Assembly. Hebrews 10:24-25 states

. . . and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

The implication here is that the Christians were still meeting together, but there was the possibility of them discontinuing this regular habit. The writer now takes this opportunity to encourage them to meet “all the more” and he connects this with the process of stimulating one another to love and good deeds.

Luke records in Acts 20:7 the following:

And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

This picture of the early Christians presents them as meeting at night, probably after they had finished work. They had gathered together “to break bread,” but Paul used it as an opportunity to give them a speech, which lasted until midnight. The day was Sunday, the first day of the week. A similar reference to the first day of the week is made in 1 Corinthians 16:2.

The gathering together “to break bread” is a reference to the Lord’s supper and it is this subject to which Paul addresses himself in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. This passage portrays a picture of the early church that is almost exactly the opposite of that portrayed in Acts 2 and 4. As in Acts 2 and 4, the Christians came together. But these Corinthians came together, as verse 17 declares, “not for the better but for the worse.” Verses 18 and 19 tell of the existence of divisions and factions. Verse 21 emphasizes each one eating “his own” supper.

Worship. Corporately, thankfulness to God and glorifying God are often represented in scripture by song (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19-20). Because of the corporate nature of rejoicing, thanking and praising, Romans 15:6 states the importance of harmony in the group

Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From the beginning, singing was connected with the Lord’s supper, as Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26 demonstrate: “And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

²⁰ Bauer, Lexicon, s.v. “αγαλλιασις,” p. 3.

Corporate prayer was also made in church assemblies. The disciples, prior to Pentecost, were in the upper room “continually devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). Peter, after being released from prison, went to a place where the Christians “were gathered together and were praying” (Acts 12:12). Paul urged the Romans “to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me . . .” (Rom. 15:30). Hence, prayer is an integral part of corporate worship.

Summary

The assembly of Christians together for worship is to be encouraged. Christian assembly is important to the process of stimulation to love and good deeds. The early Christians met at a regular time, usually on Sunday. The assembly is not to be a time when social distinctions and factions are fostered.

Just as in Acts 2 and 4, worship in the assembly includes songs of thankfulness to God. Those who worship are to be unified in glorifying the Lord. The Lord’s supper is a part of worship and song is appropriate in its observance. Prayer is important to corporate worship.

Clustering of Believers

Clustering in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37

It is significant that the only reference in the New Testament to Christians moving together is found in Acts 2:44: “And all those who had believed were together.” Why is this so? Why the emphasis on being together?

Part of the answer may be found in understanding the nature of the influx of pilgrims during the festival season. Roland De Vaux states: “At a reasonable estimate, in our Lord’s time, the city (Jerusalem) had about twenty-five or thirty thousand inhabitants.”²⁰ But the population of Jerusalem during the time of the Passover is set by Joachim Jeremias at one hundred eighty thousand.²¹ This is a figure six times greater than the normal population of Jerusalem. The population at the time of Pentecost would not be as great, but since attendance was required at all three feasts,²² it is reasonable to estimate a population of a hundred thousand. This is well over three times the normal population.

The atmosphere, then, at the time of Pentecost, was impersonal and chaotic. The city was filled with transients. Given this type of atmosphere, and given the cultural background of the first Christians—a background which will be shown below to have emphasized close, intimate ties—it was normal for them to seek each other’s presence, particularly since many of them had been transient pilgrims themselves and could easily make the move.

Clustering Illustrated in Other New Testament Literature

The necessity of assembling together for worship required the subdivision of Christians into congregations determined by geographical area. Those who met together had to be within walking or riding distance of each other. This close proximity of believers provided the opportunity, not only for planned meetings, but also for spontaneous interaction. Close social contact with other believers seems to be presupposed in many New Testament passages. Paul talks about younger widows in 1 Timothy 5:13 who “learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busy bodies, talking about things not proper to mention.”

Concerning the concept of “house,” Michel writes

Primitive Christianity structured its congregations in families, groups and “houses.” The house was both a fellowship and a place of meeting. Thus we read of the house of Stephanas in 1 Cor. 1:16, the house of Philemon in Philemon 2, the house of Cornelius in Acts 11:14, the house of

²⁰ Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1961), 1:17. Joachim Jeremias gives the same figure as the upper limit, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions During the New Testament Period (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), trans. By F. H. and C. H. Cave, pp. 77-84.

²¹ Jeremias, Jerusalem, p. 84.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

Lydia in Acts 16:15, the house of the prison governor at Philippi in Acts 16:21, 34. Acts 18:8 also refers to the faith of Crispus and his whole house. It is also likely that the house of Onesiphorus in 2 Tim. 1:16; 4:19 is a house fellowship of this kind.²³

Michel goes on to say

It seems to me that the importance of the οἶκος and familia in the structure of the Christian community has not yet been fully recognized.... We have here a natural growth of congregations which runs counter to the individualistic process of disintegration.²⁴

Since the early church put such a stress on the home, it is not surprising that the concept of hospitality is stressed in the New Testament. In Luke 14, Luke devotes much space to recording Christ's views regarding hospitality.²⁵ Dinner guests are to recline "at the last place" and hosts are to invite, not their friends, brothers, relatives, and the rich neighbors, but "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind."

Other New Testament passages relating to hospitality are Hebrews 13:1-2, where Christians are commanded to be hospitable to strangers; 1 Peter 4:9, which exhorts Christians to be hospitable to each other without complaint; 2 John 10:11, where Christians are not to be hospitable to those teaching false doctrine; Romans 12:13, which states that hospitality is a means by which Christians can demonstrate their love and devotion to one another; and finally, 1 Timothy 5:10, Titus 1:6, and 1 Timothy 3:2, which give the requirement of hospitality for overseers and approved widows.

One indication of how close the Christians were to each other is their view of themselves as neighbors. Romans 15:2 says: "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification." Ephesians 4:25 equates membership in the body of Christ with neighbor: "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another."

The extent of the average Hebrew's interaction with his neighbor is discussed by Ludwig Kohler

We may make a rough guess that a Hebrew village did not contain more than about three to five hundred inhabitants... Even larger settlements, and Jerusalem itself, will hardly have contained more than a few thousand inhabitants. They are moreover divided into quarters: Upper City, Lower City, Old City, New City.... The separate quarters probably did not have much to do with one another.

.....

The Hebrew thus grew up in a fairly small community, in which everyone knows everyone else, observes, judges, and has contact in friendship or hostility. One is never alone. One does what everybody else does. One sees what everyone else does. To this is added the fact that the whole of daily life takes place in the open air, in that space between the houses which we call the street, although there were no real streets, but only the irregularly shaped pieces of ground on which no houses stand. The house itself, very simple and without light...serves only as a sleeping place at night, and as protection in time of rain. As far as possible men live in the open air. We need a reason for leaving the house; the Hebrew needs a reason for going into it.²⁶

²³ Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. And ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, s.v. "οἶκος," by Tübingen Otto Michel, 5 (1967):130.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

²⁵ "in the Gospels the custom of hospitality plays an extraordinarily important role. Luke is the Evangelist who evinces an obvious interest in it (7:36ff.; 9:51ff.; 10:38ff.; 14:1ff., etc.). From the external standpoint, the work of Jesus obviously rested to a large degree on the hospitality extended to Him (Mk. 1:29ff.; 2:15ff.; 14:3ff. etc.). In the parables He plainly accords great significance to hospitality (cf. Lk. 10:34ff.; 11:5ff.; 14:22ff. etc.)." *Ibid.*, s.v. "ζενοσ," Vol 5, p. 20.

²⁶ Ludwig Kohler, Hebrew Man, Lectures Delivered at the Invitation of the University of Tübingen, December 1-16, 1952, trans. By Peter R. Ackroyd (London: S. C. M. Press, 1956), pp. 69-71.

Summary

There is no command in the New Testament for Christians to move together in order to form a basis for fellowship as the first Christians did in Acts 2 and 4. There is, however, an emphasis on meeting together on a regular basis for worship and mutual edification. This does not mean that the Christians were isolated from one another when not meeting corporately for worship, for the culture in which they lived provided a natural means for spontaneous interaction on a daily basis. Hence the emphasis in Scripture on the concepts of neighbor and hospitality.

The corporate Witness of Believers to the World

The Corporate Witness in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37

Acts 2:47 states that the first Christians were “praising God and having favor with all the people. There seems to have been something in the attitudes and actions of the early Christians that gave them a certain attractiveness in the eye of their contemporaries. There was a general spirit of goodwill between them and the unbelieving population. The Christians were still considered Jews so there was not the cultural barrier to overcome which developed later. The prime reason for the favor of the unbelievers seems to be the fact that they were able to observe the way the Christians interacted with each other within the non-Christian community as they prayed in the temple and ate their meals “from house to house.”

The Corporate Witness in Other New Testament Literature

In 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, Paul describes his desire to win all people in whatever way he can. Paul states “I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.” Paul is saying that Christians are to identify with non-Christians in all possible ways in order to gain them for Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:32 says: “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.” Hence, the Christian, while seeking to identify with the non-Christian, must also remove whatever hindrances there might be to communicating the gospel.

The manner in which the Christian is to respond when he is approached by a non-Christian is mentioned in three passages: Colossians 4:5-6; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; and 1 Peter 3:14. These passages indicate that the Christian is to respond patiently, gracefully, gently, kindly and reverently to those outside the faith.

Scripture also places emphasis on the need for the Christian to be able to draw others to Christ by his life as well as by his words. In Matthew 5:16, Christ commands his disciples to “Let our light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” 1 Peter 3:1 discusses the wife who, by her submissiveness, wins her husband, even though he is disobedient to the word.

Other passages touching on the example of the Christian state that the Christian is to have a good reputation with those outside the church (1 Tim. 3:7), be subject to all forms of human government, and be considerate and uncontentious (Titus 3:1-2, 2 Timothy 2:24; Romans 12:18).

Summary

The biblical picture of the relationship Christians are to have with those outside the faith can be summed up in one word: “winsomeness.” This is seen both in Acts 2 and 4 as well as the rest of the New Testament. A Christian who is winsome is one who is capable of identifying with people and does not offend them needlessly. He is capable of responding correctly when questioned about his faith. His life is an example of what he believes. That is, his actions give credibility to the gospel.

Conclusions

The principles of Christian interaction in the Christian community pictured in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37 are substantially illustrated in the rest of the New Testament. The unity experienced by these Christians receives a major emphasis in Christ’s high priestly prayer in John 17. Unity is also a major theme in Paul’s epistles. Their sacrifice for each other has its base in 1 John 3:16-18 and is exemplified by

the life and ministry of the apostle Paul. Their assembly and worship are paralleled by the command in Hebrews to not “forsake the assembling of yourselves together.” Their emphasis on the clustering of believers is expressed in the New Testament by the concepts of neighbor and hospitality. And finally, their favor with the non-Christians is a constant goal for other New Testament churches.

CHAPTER IV

THE PASADENA CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Introduction

This chapter will seek to compare a Christian community on North Mar Vista Avenue in Pasadena, California with Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37 and the principles these passages illustrate. The information gathered in this chapter is based on personal observation by the author while living in the community during the summer of 1977 and on interviews with both the Christians on and around Mar Vista and their non-Christian neighbors. These interviews were taken over several weeks spanning July and August, 1977.

Background

The Christian community in Pasadena, California began in 1970 when the young adult pastor at the Church of the Open Door and his wife, Mark and Sharon Neuenschwander, bought a home on North Mar Vista Avenue in Pasadena, California. The Church of the Open Door is a large church in downtown Los Angeles with approximately three thousand members who commute from within a radius of thirty to forty miles or more. North Mar Vista Avenue is located in an older section of Pasadena, approximately fifteen miles from the church. The population of the neighborhood is made up of older Caucasians intermixed with various minority groups.

With a desire to encourage closer fellowship, Mark and Sharon informed different couples in the young married group at the church of opportunities to buy houses in the neighborhood. Within a year, the first couple had moved in across the street. Over the next five years several more moved in: a single man bought a home and moved in next door to Mark and Sharon along with three other single men; a couple bought a home immediately behind Mark and Sharon one block to the west of Mar Vista; a couple bought a home on Mar Vista one block south of these Christians; and one couple moved into a duplex behind a home five doors up from Mark and Sharon. This same couple later bought the duplex and home in front of it and is now renting the home out to four singles, two of whom moved up from the original singles' home when its owner got married and began living there with his wife.²⁷

In August of 1977 There were sixteen adult Christians living in the community: six couples and four singles. One couple had two children and two couples had one child apiece. This brought the total number of individuals to twenty. The ages of the adults ranged from twenty to thirty years, with the average being twenty-five. The type of employment of the members included a college pastor, store manager, publication editor, landscape architect, city tree trimmer, painter, administration assistant, pharmacy technician and waiter. One of the singles was a student and only one of the housewives held an outside job. The average length of stay in the neighborhood was two years as of August 1977. Of the total number of Christians moving into the neighborhood since the community began in 1970, one single adult had moved out by August 1977 to relocate on the East Coast.

Analysis

This analysis of the Pasadena Christian community is based on the five categories of principles of Christian interaction discussed in the previous chapter: Unity Among Believers, Sacrifice by Believers for One Another, Assembly and Worship of Believers, Clustering of Believers and The Corporate Witness of Believers to the World.

Unity in the Pasadena Christian Community

When asked to number a list of factors in order of importance in influencing them to move into their community,²⁸ eleven²⁹ of the Christians³⁰ listed "the possibility of fellowship with other Christians" as

²⁷ For a map showing the location of the Christians, see Appendix B.

²⁸ The factors were: area, schools, possibility of fellowship with other Christians, type of house, distance to work/school, economic feasibility, and ministry to non-Christians.

the primary reason for their move. One couple listed “distance to work” first while another couple listed “economic feasibility” as their first choice. Significantly, these two couples were the first to move onto the block.

It seems, then, that there is general unity in terms of the goal or purpose of the community. The Christians seem to be motivated by a simple desire to be with other Christians. A further factor in this unity seems to be the attitude on the part of the individual Christians in the community that the other members are going to help them be godly and that they in turn have a responsibility to help others be godly. This attitude is summarized by the word “accountability,” a word which is heard often in the neighborhood. For example, when asked “How has living with Christians in a community affected your spiritual life?”, there were various responses, all positive, such as: “It gives a lot of joy, strength, support;” “It provides a more integrated life;” “It helps in major decisions;” “It makes you feel loved;” and “It’s a support when good or bad happens.” But the only response that was given more than once (six times) was “It keeps me accountable.”³¹ The underlying attitude to this response seems to be that their actions are open and visible, that they are answerable for those actions before their fellow believers, and that, should those actions be out of line, they expect to be told.

Another contributing factor to unity seems to be the lack of any major friction or disagreement within the group. When asked the question “Are there any negative experiences you have had while living in Christian community?” fourteen replied “no” and only one replied “yes.” The reason given for the positive response was that he was dissatisfied with the way children in the less immediate community were disciplined by their (non-Christian) parents. These types of responses could have been slanted by the respondents to give a better picture of the community than actually exists, but other results in the interview and the author’s own observation over the course of twelve weeks support its accuracy. During the three months the writer lived in the community he could detect few negative attitudes towards other Christians in the neighborhood. Rather, the Christians seemed to enjoy being in each other’s presence with very relaxed and unstrained attitudes. Some of the questions in the interview were designed to draw out possible areas of strain, but the results were generally negative. When asked “Has there been any problem with gossip?”, fourteen said “no,” and only one said “yes.” The one answering “yes” qualified it, however, by saying that it was nothing major and that it was “solved real quick.” To the question “Do you feel restricted in any way by living close to other Christians?” ten said “no” and five said “yes.” Three of those five said that the only way they felt restricted was that it kept them from doing wrong. The other two said that at times they just wanted to be alone. This desire to be alone was expressed more fully in response to the question “Do you ever feel the need to get away from the community by yourself?” Five said they didn’t. One said “sometimes.” Five said they did, but added that they would need to whether they lived in a community or not. And four (two couples) gave an unqualified yes.

Summary. The Jerusalem church had a unity that was expressed on several different levels, including the spiritual, economical, emotional, geographical, and social. In the same way, the Mar Vista community has a unity on many levels, some of which will be discussed later. The primary level of unity seems to be in their purpose or goal. They all have a desire to be with other Christians on a daily basis and for most this was their prime reason for moving into the neighborhood.

The unity in the community is evidenced in a positive way by a high degree of harmony, union, and general agreement. There seems to be little, if no, partiality, division, jealousy and selfish ambition. The members of the community seem to be pursuing “the things which make for peace and the building up of one another” by holding themselves accountable to each other. They seem to enjoy each other’s presence with no friction. They express a general contentment in living near other Christians but some do feel the need to get away at times.

²⁹ The total number of Christians surveyed was fifteen. All figures referring to the Christians’ presuppose fifteen responses unless otherwise noted.

³⁰ “Christians,” “Pasadena Christian community” and “Mar Vista community” will be interchangeable to reduce monotony.

³¹ This response is significant in view of the fact that the question was open-ended. Similar responses indicate, not only common attitudes, but that these attitudes were foremost in their minds.

Sacrifice in the Pasadena Christian Community

The believers in the Pasadena Christian community were asked the following question: "What kind of financial transactions occur in the community?" Answers ranged from "Mostly labor is traded" to "Sharing of physical goods" and "Not much money (exchanges hands)."

These vague responses could be misleading, however, since there is an unspoken rule in the community based on Matthew 6:1 that whenever gifts are made, they be made secretly, without telling other members of the community. This is an interesting deviation from the early Christian community which approved of open giving and lauded it as in the case of Barnabas who laid his money "at the apostles' feet." This tendency toward secrecy in financial giving has a two-fold result. First, it gives the individual members of the community the general impression that not much is being given since they only know about what they receive or give. And secondly, it makes them hesitant to respond on a questionnaire regarding what they themselves have given. Hence, it is very difficult to estimate the extent of financial sacrifice, if any, in the community. One response summed up the attitude toward financial giving: "If there is a need they try to meet the need."

The responses to the question indicate that whatever giving takes place is not limited to financial transactions. Much labor is exchanged. While the writer was living in the community, for example, one member, who works as a tree trimmer, trimmed the trees for another member of the community who, as a painter, had done some painting for him. Tools are exchanged as well, with some members trying to buy tools they know no one else has so that they will have something to share with the rest of the community.

Often gifts are made, not for the purpose of meeting an outstanding need, but simply to show love. One respondent to the questionnaire called these "just because" gifts. These take the form of specially prepared dishes brought over on the spur of the moment, vegetables from a garden, or a special service. For example, when one of the couples was away for the day, the other Christians in the community got together and planted their garden for them as a surprise.

The stability of each family unit and single adult seems to free the Christian community to minister to others. Certain non-Christian neighbors in the community have received help in various ways from their Christian neighbors, mostly in the form of manual labor. Ministry to those outside the neighborhood often takes the form of hospitality. One single parent from outside of the immediate neighborhood leaves her son at one of the homes of a Christian couple in the community where he is taken care of free of charge while his mother works. A victim of hepatitis spent several weeks convalescing in the home of another couple in the community (she later became a Christian). And one of the members of the community came to live there after staying for an extended period as a guest in a home in the community.

Summary. Sacrifice in the Christian community in Pasadena, California does not occur to the same degree as it did in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37 largely because there is not the same degree of need as there was in Jerusalem around the time of the apostles. All of the families and single adults in the Pasadena community are self-supporting as opposed to the situation in Jerusalem where many of the believers were unable to support themselves. Furthermore, when sacrifice does occur, it is not as radical as it is in Acts 2 and 4. There is no outright selling of property for the purpose of meeting needs because those needs do not exist at the present moment.

As for the attitude of "having all things common" expressed in Acts 2 and 4, the members of the Pasadena community affirm personal property and the need to respect the rights of each individual with regard to what is theirs. There is, however, a willingness to share in significant ways. These attitudes are parallel to Acts 2 and 4 since it has been shown that these passages do not advocate abolition of personal property but rather present the Christians as regarding their property as common to all and eager to provide for the needs of others when those needs arose.

The adult Christians in the community are self-supporting. There are none who refuse to work. They do not seem to be materialistic, though they do enjoy what they have. They are aware of the needs of others and try to meet those needs in practical, need-oriented ways.

Assembly and Worship in the Pasadena Christian Community

The Christians in Pasadena have no regular time when they all meet together. There is a community fellowship for couples on Wednesday evening for two hours, a women's Bible study and a men's Bible study. But at no time do all the members of the community come together on a regular basis. The reason for this is that the community has relied heavily on the church to provide its structured time of

fellowship. The extent of their dependence upon the church to provide this structured time is indicated by their response to the following question: "If all the Christians in the community attended several different churches while living in the same community, do you feel you would be as close to them as you are now?" Only five said "yes" while ten said "no." When those who said "no" were asked why, they responded: "Because so much is centered around it;" "Couldn't share the same goals;" "Sometimes the only time we see each other is at church."

This last response is significant. When asked "How often do you see other Christians in the community apart from church?" twelve answered "daily," one said "five times a week," and two answered "twice a week." That is, all the members see at least one other member (outside his immediate family) at least twice a week. But that does not necessarily mean that every member sees every other member at least twice a week. When asked "Are there Christians in the community you seldom see apart from church?" thirteen said "yes" and only two said "no." Of the thirteen responding positively, three said they seldom saw ten per cent, two said they seldom saw fifteen per cent, three said they seldom saw fifty per cent, and two said they seldom saw one hundred per cent.

It seems then, that, while the community is relying heavily on the church to provide a structure in which all of them can meet together, there exists uneven fellowship within the community itself. This is born out by the response to the question: "On a scale of one to ten, with ten being adequate and one being not adequate, how would you rate your fellowship in the community?" The overall average response was 8.5. But when the married couples alone were averaged together, they came out with 9.22, while the singles averaged only 6.0.

One possible way to correct this might be to form a church out of the community itself. The question was asked: "If the community were itself a church, how do you feel it would affect each of you?" There were several positive responses: "Fantastic.... It would be ideal." "We would probably be a lot closer." "We would be forced to be involved with each other." "It would bring us closer together." "Intimacy would grow." And "There would be much more of an active involvement." But there were also several negative responses: "We could be a lot more ingrown." "It would limit growth because of limited resources.... It would limit perspective." "We would get tired of each other." "We would miss the opportunities to meet others and get their ideas." And "It's hard to visualize. We would be almost afraid." It seems, then, that some of the members desire the increased intimacy that might come from forming their community into a church. Others, however, appreciate the interaction that comes from being involved in a large church.

The obvious solution is that the Christians have a specific time when all of them get together on a regular basis. That this was on the minds of several people was indicated by their response to the question: "Are there any improvements you would make in the community?" some of the responses were: "I would have everyone get together more often." "I would try to stimulate interaction between the married couples and the singles." "It would be desirable to have a regular group meeting." "I would have dinners more often." "I would get together more, see each other more."

Summary. The Pasadena Christian community definitely suffers from lack of a regular time when all of them can assemble together. This lack is felt most by the singles. Another problem is that Mark and Sharon Neuenschwander are now attending a different church. This means that they were all of the members of the community together neither in the neighborhood nor at the Church of the Open Door. An emphasis on meeting together on a regular basis, but not necessarily forming a church, would continue to allow the interaction so important to many of the members, encourage deeper relationships, involve the singles more in the community along with Mark and Sharon, and make it more natural for those Christians who move into the community but who attend a different church to become a part of the community.

Clustering in the Pasadena Christian Community

The question to be considered in this section is: How does living near other Christians affect one's spiritual life and the life of the community? The question was asked: "If all the Christians in the community were attending the same church but living in widely separated geographical locations, do you feel you would be as close to them as you are now? Why?" Thirteen responded "no" and two responded "yes." Of the two responding "yes," one qualified it by adding "if the church were close by,": the other one added: "If we were separated, we would tend to make time for each other. We have scheduled each other out of each other's lives." Significantly, the last respondent was a single.

Those who felt they would not be as close if they were not living near each other but attending the same church gave the following reasons: “We couldn’t go out of the way (as often?), no time.” “We would have no day to day casual contact.” “There’s a psychological element. Also, you see people in different situations.” “You’re closer to the people you’re (geographically) near.” “We wouldn’t have the kind of contact. It wouldn’t be as often.” “We can help out easier (as it is), (otherwise) opportunities wouldn’t be as often.” “We can’t be omnipresent.” “We couldn’t share everyday joys and trials.” “We can see the children, get involved in family life.”

The response to the following question, however, was more ambivalent: “Has the community taken over some of the functions the church has fulfilled for you in the past?” Eight said “no,” two said “yes,” and two couldn’t answer. One of those responding “yes” made a significant statement: “Socialization...I don’t feel the need to go to a social anymore.” One of those responding “no” stated: “(Community) is completely different from everything else.”

It is significant to note that the item referred to in the last section, where the respondents were asked to rate their fellowship on a scale of one to ten, received a high overall average of 8.5 in spite of the fact that the community never met together as a total unit. This includes five who responded with a score of “ten,” in other words, a perfect score. This seems to indicate that the spontaneous interaction afforded by close geographical clustering provides significant fellowship.

This high degree of satisfaction with living in close proximity to other Christians was reflected in the response to another question: “If you were not living in the community, would you miss it?” All of them answered “yes.”

And finally, The Christians were asked whether they would recommend to other Christians that they seek Christian community. Again, all of them responded “yes.” One person added a significant comment: “Yes. We wouldn’t force it. We wish all Christians could experience what we’ve experienced. But you can’t force it.”

Summary. By moving into an area where they are close enough together to see each other on a daily basis, the Christians in Pasadena have significantly increased their fellowship. Because of the geographical closeness of their homes, the Christians in the Mar Vista community have relied heavily on spontaneity to produce the context for their fellowship with one another, and for the most part, they are satisfied with this type of fellowship.

Like the Christians in Jerusalem, the Christians in Pasadena seem to have provided a structure which is capable of counteracting certain impersonal and chaotic trends in present day society. They have fellowship on a daily basis and see each other, not only at church, but in the intimate context of the home. The Christians know each other as literally their “neighbors.” They exhibit hospitality by inviting each other into their homes. And finally, they enjoy their community and communion with each other and exhibit a contentment in it.

The Corporate Witness of the Pasadena Christian Community

In order to ascertain whether the Christians had left any type of major impression on their non-Christian neighbors and, if so, what type of impression that might be, the author interviewed seventeen non-Christians on both sides of Mar Vista surrounding the heaviest concentration of Christians.³² Two questions were asked, followed by two more if the second was answered positively. The questions were: “How long have you lived here? Have you noticed any change in the neighborhood during the last few years? If so, what type of change have you noticed? What do you think about that change?”

From the first question, “How long have you lived here?” it was learned that the average length of stay was thirteen years. Two had lived in their homes fifty-seven and forty-four years respectively. Nine had lived there less than five years and four of those less than one year.

To the second question, “Have you noticed any change in the neighborhood during the last few years?” nine responded “yes” and eight responded “no.” Four of the eight were those who had lived there less than one year. Interestingly, the respondent who had lived there fifty-seven years said he observed “no change” but then added that “it couldn’t get worse.” Whether or not this is a specific reference to Christians, it is hard to be sure. The neighborhood, once all white, had at one time an influx of black and

³² In order to protect the low profile the Christians had in the community, nothing was mentioned about Christianity in the interview. The purpose of the interview was to see whether the non-Christians themselves would mention their Christian neighbors and their attitudes about them without any prompting.

Mexican American families. This could have been the reason for the remark. In any case, the person did not elaborate and the response seems to contradict itself.

It is known, however, that some of those answering “yes” to the second question definitely had the race issue in mind. To the third question, “What type of change have you noticed?” one responded “apartments built, variety of people, blacks come and go, houses have changed hands.” Asked what he thought about these developments he responded: “Some are good, some are bad. No real trend except until just recently when a group of you people bought houses. I feel better now than I did a few years ago.”

This is almost certainly a reference to the Christians on the block since all of them are young and they are the only ones who have bought their homes in any kind of coordinated way. Furthermore, they are all white and the indication is that the respondent feels better because white people have been moving into the neighborhood and started a “trend.”

A parallel attitude is reflected in the answers of another respondent. When asked what change he had noticed in the neighborhood, he answered: “less blacks.” When asked how he felt about this he answered: “better.”

Another respondent said he felt the area had become a “better neighborhood.... People are putting money into their places.” He said he was positive about it but limited it only to “this block, the immediate neighborhood.”

Two other people noticed the same type of change. One said “renovation,” another said “(they) keep things up better.” Both felt positive about it. These type of responses seem to reflect the emphasis the Christians have put in helping each other fix up their homes. Originally the homes were in very poor condition for the most part. But having fixed them up, the houses appreciated and, with them, the homes of the non-Christians surrounding them.

Only one person, herself not a believer according to the Christians in the community, mentioned Christians outright. When asked what change she had noticed she said: “A lot of Christians.” And when asked what she thought about that change she said: “I like it.” (She didn’t elaborate, however.) It’s significant that this person lives almost in the geographical center of the Christians.

Several questions were asked of the Christians themselves in order to ascertain their attitudes towards their non-Christian neighbors.

To the question, “Since you have been living with Christians, do you feel more capable of witnessing to non-Christians? Ten said “yes,” four said “no difference’ or “no direct effect” and one said “don’t know.” The one responding “don’t know” said he had “hardly any contact with the outside world.” The couple responding “no direct effect” qualified it by saying that “you can use the neighborhood as an example” and that the husband’s non-Christian family “sees the rest of the neighborhood.” This idea that the community is a showcase to the non-Christians is prevalent in the answers of those responding “yes.” Some of these responses are: “You have a loving community behind you;” “You have something to share;” and “You can demonstrate together what you can’t demonstrate alone.” Other responses include: “Christian community gives a boldness;” “Can focus on difference between having Christ and not having Christ;” “Can hold each other accountable (to witness)” and “You can do it together.”

As for direct contact with non-Christians, five responded negatively to the question “Do you have much contact with the non-Christians in your community?” while nine responded favorably (out of only fourteen answering). Of the ones responding negatively, the ones with the least frequent contact with non-Christians did so not less than once every two weeks. Of those responding positively, three had daily contact.

To the question, “Do you know many non-Christians on the block, twelve said “yes” while three said “no.”

Finally, the question was asked “What progress have you made with non-Christians on the block?” Responses varied from “given them the gospel,” “Seen a real turn-around in one non-Christian couple,” and “Have gotten them to come to church” to “none,” “slow,” and “gotten to know them better and better.”

Summary. The Christians in the Mar Vista community seem to have the favor of their neighbors. There were no negative attitudes expressed about them and all references to them, both direct and indirect, were favorable. The major reasons for their favorable acceptance seems to be the economic and social impact the Christians have had in the community. Had all or some of the Christians been black, and/or Mexican, or had the Christians failed to fix up their homes, the results may have been quite different. In any case, the non-Christians tend to see the Christians as a stabilizing influence in their community. This seems to correlate well with the “favor” the Jerusalem Christians had with their contemporaries and with the general principle of identification and non-offensiveness.

The Christians themselves have a desire to share the gospel with their neighbors and do in many cases. The general attitude seems to be long term witnessing though life-style and verbally communicating the gospel when the time is right. Some in the community, however, feel that they need to improve.

Conclusion

An analysis of the Christian community in Pasadena, California on the basis of Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37 and the five categories of principles—unity of believers, sacrifice by believers for one another, assembly and worship of believers, clustering of believers, and the corporate witness of believers—exemplified in these passages, produced the following conclusions: The Christians on Mar Vista demonstrate a high degree of unity on the levels of the spiritual, motivational, geographical, emotional, and economical. There is a unity of mind and heart and there seems to be no division or strife. In the area of sacrifice, the Christians on Mar Vista demonstrate a willingness to meet whatever needs come up in the community. They are self-supporting and capable of meeting needs outside the community as well as within the community itself. In the realm of assembly and worship, the Christians have failed to plan a time where all can meet together, and this seems to have affected them adversely, especially the singles. As a result, there is little corporate worship within the community. In the area of clustering, the Christians have, by moving close enough to each other to see each other spontaneously, markedly increased their fellowship and seem very encouraged with this. And finally, in the area of corporate witness to the world, the non-believers look upon the believers in a favorable light, though perhaps not necessarily for the best of motives. The Christians themselves have made some headway with their non-Christian neighbors but feel they need to do more.

The community, then, seems to fulfill most Biblical principles relating to Christian interaction. For the most part it compares favorably with the community in Acts 2 and 4. And finally, the community seems to be a source of encouragement and edification to the Christians involved, as well as a means of witness to the non-Christians surrounding them.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to examine the Pasadena Christian community in the light of Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37. It has been shown that, with respect to the five categories discussed above, the Pasadena Christian community approaches, but does not duplicate, the community described in Acts. If, then, Christian community is possible for the present day, how should it be regarded in the local church?

There are several positive characteristics of Christian community that make it an attractive option for the local church.

One such positive characteristic of Christian community is that it increases the possibility for spontaneous fellowship. They are able to see each other within their living contexts on a daily basis. They can share burdens as those burdens arise, experience each other's strengths and weaknesses, admonish each other, love each other, care for each other, and all the other things the New Testament says Christians are to do for each other in a very casual and natural manner.

Another positive characteristic of Christian community is that it makes Christian values observable. As non-Christians observe Christians interacting with each other in their neighborhoods, the values these Christians emulate become very practical. In a sense, Christian community brings Christianity into the streets.

Furthermore, Christian community opens up the possibility of a major sociological impact. If the Christians on Mar Vista could have the positive influence that they did on their block, one might ask what the effect would be of twenty-five, fifty, or even a hundred such Christian communities in a given geographical location.

Yet another positive characteristic of Christian community is that it counteracts the impersonal, divisive, and chaotic trends in our society. It builds a cohesion among Christians by giving specific content to the word "neighbor."

And finally, Christian community can be exceedingly simple. It demands no programs, boards, or organizations. While it may begin by Christians moving close to each other, that doesn't have to be the case. One Christian, taking a deep concern for his neighbors by evangelizing his block, could start his own community without anyone moving at all.

But having pointed out some of the positive characteristics of Christian community, it is necessary to add that there are certain dangers.

First of all, in many ways the Pasadena Christian community is unique. Mark Neuenschwander was in a position of leadership in the church and could encourage others to move onto the block. The couples moving into the neighborhood were young and flexible. The neighborhood made the buying of homes economically feasible. The large turnover of homes made it possible to buy them. The couples moving into the community demonstrated a high degree of spiritual maturity. And a common bond already existed prior to the formation of the community. To try to force people into a community having the same form as the Pasadena community would be wrong. Every community formed must have its own unique character.

Secondly, mere geographical proximity does not guarantee true community. In many areas of the country there are Christians living together (i.e. a dorm on a Christian college), but they don't necessarily have community because they may not be consciously acting on the basis of their responsibility to each other. Christian community is an expression, not a cause, of the love Christians can have for each other.

And finally, Christian community can be perverted. It could stunt leadership development by encouraging people to be dependent on the community. It could also narrow the vision of Christians by focusing their attention almost totally on their block. It could emphasize the group at the cost of the individual, abrogating personal property rights and responsibilities. It could foster dictatorial figures. And it could develop into a modern-day monasticism. That is, it could encourage Christians to isolate themselves from the world.

But having noted the dangers of Christian community, it is the author's opinion that, based on the findings of this thesis, the advantages of Christian community far outweigh the disadvantages. With sufficient prayer, caution, and attention to the Word, the church should be able to avoid the pitfalls of community and enjoy its blessings.

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PHRASES IN ACTS 4:32-37

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
All Who had believed were together	Had all things in common	Began Selling property and possessions	Shared with all	Met needs	Day by day	Continuing with one mind
Acts 12:12 Acts 20:7 Romans 12:13 Romans 15:7 Ephesians 2:22 Ephesians 3:13 Ephesians 4:25 Philippians 4:22 (Clusters) Colossians 1:4 Colossians 2:2 Hebrews 10:23-24 James 2:1-4 I John 2:19 II Thess. 3:6-15	Philippians 4:10-12 II Thess. 1:3 II Thess. 3:8-15 Hebrews 10:34 Hebrews 13:16	Romans 12:13 Romans 12:20-21 Roamns 12:8-10 Romans 15:20 I Corinthians 10:24 I Corinthians 13:3 II Corinthians 8:1-15 Galatians 2:10 Galatians 6:8-10 I Timothy 5:8 I Timothy 6:5-10 I Timothy 6:17-19 Titus 2:11-14 Titus 2:8 Titus 3:14 James 1:9-11 James 5:1-6 I John 3:16-18 Philippians 2:3-4	I Corinthians 12:7	Acts 11:29-30 Acts 20:34-35 I Timothy 2:10 I timothy 5:16 James 2:14-16 Ehpesains 4:28 I Thess. 4:9-12	Acts 5:42 Acts 16:5 Acts 17:11 Acts 20:31 Hebrews 3:13	Acts 5:12 Romans 12:16 Romans 15:5,6 Romans 16:17 I Corinthians 1:10ff I Corinthians 11:18 I Corinthians 12:25-27 Ephesians 4:3, 11-16 Philippians 1:27 Philippians 2:2 Philippians 4:2 James 3:13-18 John 17
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Prayer and common worship	Breaking Bread from house to house	Took meals together	Gladness and sincerity of heart	Praising God	Having favor with all the people	Daily increase
Acts 9:42 Romans 12:12 Romans 15:30 Colossians 4:2 I Thess. 5:17 I Peter 4:7	Acts 8:3 Acts 9:42 Acts 16:5 Acts 20:20 I Corinthians 11:20-34 I Corinthians 16:19 Colossians 4:15 I Timothy 3:2 I Timothy 3:15 I Timothy 5:10 I Timothy 9:13 Titus 1:8 Titus 1:11 Philippians 2 Hebrews 13:2 I Peter 4:9 II John 10-11 Romans 13:13	Romans 14:1-23 II Corinthians 13:14 Galatians 2:11-13 I Corinthians 11:17-34	Galatians 5:22 Colossians 1:11-12 Colossians 3:16 I Thess. 5:18	Romans 15:6 Ephesians 5:14-20 Thess. 5:16	Acts 5:13 Romans 12:18 I Cor. 10:32-33 II Cor. 6:3 Colossians 5:5,6 I Timothy 3:7 Titus 3:2 I Peter 2:12 I Corinthians 9:19 I Cor. 9:20-23 I Peter 3:13-16 II Timothy 2:24-26	Acts 5:14 Acts 6:7

15	16	17	18	19	20
One heart and one soul	None claimed his own possessions	All things common	Witness to resurrection	Abundant grace upon all	No Needy person
Romans 14:19 Ephesians 1:15 I Peter 3:8,9	Philippians 14		I Cor. 15:10-11		
21 All who owned land sold it	22 Give proceeds to apostles	23 Distributed to needy	24 Interdependence	25 Barnabas	
Romans 19:1-3			Romans 12:4 ff I Peter 4:10	II Corinthians 9:6 Philippians 14	

APPENDIX B

A Map of the
Pasadena Christian Community

Below is a map showing the relation of the Christians with each other and with their non-Christian neighbors. Squares with an "X" in them indicate members of the Christian community.

