

The Church: A caring community of believers

A deacon living in a Berkshire town was requested to give his prayers in behalf of a poor man with a large family who had broken his leg. "I can't stop now to pray," said the deacon (who was picking and barrelling his early apples for the city market), "but you can *go* down into the cellar and get some corned beef, salt pork, potatoes, and butter; that's the best I can do."

Sunday School Chronicle.

James 2:14-17 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

1) Real faith is noticeable in real actions

- The church isn't a club for every and anyone to join. It's the fellowship of believers i.e. those who have believed in Jesus and his sacrificial death on the cross on our behalf.
- We are believers because we have believed. That means we have put our faith in Jesus. We trust him for our salvation, our present life, and our future in this world and beyond.
 - Romans 1:5 Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the **obedience that comes from faith** for his name's sake.
- We don't obey to believe; we obey because we believe.
 - Abraham believed God so he left his home to go to the promised land.
 - Abraham believed God and so obeyed by offering up his son as a sacrifice at God's command.
 - Noah believed God and built an ark even when there was no sign of rain.
 - Moses believed God and led the Israelites through the Red Sea on dry land.
- If our faith isn't noticeable in real actions then we need to question the reality and validity of our faith.
 - We are recognised by our fruit (Matthew 7: 20)
 - Our faith isn't in merely saying the right sounding spiritual things, in the Christian looking WhatsApp and Facebook posts, in forwarding messages that promise blessings.
- Obeying the commands of Christ reveals our faith. Some of those commands are:
 - Loving God and your neighbour.
 - Loving your enemies.
 - Repentance
 - Forgiveness
 - Trusting God
 - Making disciples

2) Real faith is noticeable in real love

- The fruit of faith that I'll be focusing on is our love for one another.
 - John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."
 - 1 John 3:18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.
- Real love for one another isn't soppy sentimental love that has no substance and doesn't have any value when a person is in real need and really needs true practical caring love.
- Real love is the love that Christ has for us – as I have loved you.
- This true love for one another is revealed in practical care in the "one another verses".

- Attitude
 - 1 Corinthians 12:25 There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have **equal concern for each other**.
 - 1 Peter 5:5 All of you, clothe yourselves with **humility toward one another**.
 - Philippians 2:3-4 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility **value others above yourselves**, not looking to your own interests but each of you to **the interests of the others**.
- Actions
 - Romans 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to **mutual edification**.
 - Galatians 5:13 Do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, **serve one another** humbly in love.
 - Galatians 6:2 **Carry each other's burdens**, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
 - Ephesians 4:15 Instead, **speaking the truth in love**, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.
 - Colossians 3:16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and **admonish one another with all wisdom**.
 - Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how we may **spur one another on toward love and good deeds**, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but **encouraging one another**.
 - 1 Peter 4:9 **Offer hospitality to one another** without grumbling.
 - James 5:16 Therefore **confess your sins to each other** and **pray for each other** so that you may be healed.
- Caring is mutual – it goes both ways. It doesn't ask what the church can do for me, but what I can do for the church.
 - Needs can be material, spiritual, emotional, or psychological.
 - Not everyone can meet all needs. We need everyone in the church to care for the members in order for the needs of the church to be met.

3) The testimony of the early church

- The early church was a caring church, although there were also problems in the church.
- The first church that existed was started in Jerusalem and they cared for one another in practical ways.
 - Acts 2:44-45 All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.
- The church in Antioch helped the Christians in Judea during a famine.
 - Acts 11:29-30 The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.
- The Macedonian churches were commended for their caring attitude towards the believers
 - 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.
- The examples above are mainly focused on caring through giving. However, there are many other ways that we can care for each other. Just be open hearted and willing to do what you can to uphold a relieve someone else of their burden.