**The Bridge/Columbus**

*“Ministry with the Poor, the Disadvantaged, & the at Risk*

*In Central Ohio”*

Key Concepts: 2 Cor.8-9; Acts 2:42-44

One of the central ministries of the church in every age has been an authentic outreach to the poor of the world. (Deut.15:7; Mk.14:7) Jesus said in Mark 14:7 that the poor would always be with us and “whenever you will you can do good to them.” As we read the Epistles, we see the infant church following up on this direction from our Lord.

In 1 Corinthians chapters 8-9, the Apostle Paul is urging the saints to follow through on a previous commitment (intention) to support the Mother Church in Jerusalem with financial assistance. In fact he boasted about it during his ministry among the Macedonians (8:11; 9:2-5) When writing to the Church in Rome he also mentioned this fact as part of his ongoing itinerary. (Ro.15:25-27) In addition, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul primes the pump with a section describing the logistics of such a collection for Jerusalem by the Corinthians. (1 Cor.16:1-4)

The key concept here is that the outlying churches (Gentile) would take up offerings for the Mother Church in Jerusalem (Jewish). This witness would accomplish two distinct things. It would first minister to the physical needs of the church in Jerusalem as well as become a wonderful witness of the Koinonia operative in the early church at large. This would all be done in a spirit of grace/charis; a term Paul uses with vast semantic range, from “grace” to “goodwill” to “favor” to “gracious deed or gift” to “thanks or gratitude” (8:1,4,6-7,9 16,19;9:8,14-15). It is the single most frequently used major term in 2 Corinthians 8-9 as well as Paul using it to open every one of his letters.

As I muse on this concept of Christian love and fellowship, I am struck by the fact that we can take this model and use it in Columbus Ohio as well. Actually this has already been done some 30 years ago with a group that I served with called “One Foundation.” We would motivate the suburban churches who in most cases had the money and resources to bridge to the inner city churches that in most cases had the infrastructure and the contacts to minister with the poor. One Foundation became a fantastic opportunity to engage with the poor of our city by sending thousands of dollars a month to the cause. Following changes in leadership and design the foundation fell on difficult times and finally folded. I am proposing we refire it under the direction of the Five Points-Greater Columbus Apostolic Network and call it “The Bridge/Columbus.

All this leads to our second concept found in Acts 2:42-44. Here we see the infant church so in love with Jesus that they willingly brought their resources to the Apostles (elders) for distribution to all who had need. The zinger here is that the Apostles carried the credibility for verification and integrity of the process. Many today feel that “socialism” will accomplish these goals. However, with socialism you must qualify for a pre-arranged eligibility scale which includes cultural factors such as income, family size, age and others. After in the system for a period of time and on the government dole, folks can “game” the system to obtain more down the road. For the church of Jesus Christ, the ACTS model is much superior. Leadership with a proven track record can oversee the process as a portal from Heaven can open to the community.

In the New Testament the word “Koinonia” (fellowship) was a well-known word from Greek philosophy indicating friendship or “all things in common.” You see the fellowship of believers share more than common beliefs and core values. They also display a profound regard for one another’s physical and spiritual well-being as a community of friends. As Peter Wagner says in his commentary on Acts, the early Christians were more radical in their giving and sharing of material possessions than we are today because of their relationships. They were so connected that they could not “tolerate anyone in the church living with material need while others enjoyed relative prosperity.”

You see in the book of Acts, in light of the resurrection and outpouring of the Holy Spirit---a new community of faith is generated in the earth. This new community practiced some familiar patterns from their previous religious culture such as attending the Temple, and gathering together from house to house to eat. However, the most distinctive practice of the community of believers’ common life was the sharing of goods. The community of goods in Acts is an important theme. It is actually indicative of those economic priorities of the “restored Israel” of God and most likely from Luke’s perspective are tied to the prophetic typology of Jubilee (Lev.25:10) as well as Isaiah’s favorable year of the Lord (Is.61:2; Lk. 4:19)

In my book “Ice on Fire”, I quote Wolfgang Simpson’s five reasons why people were drawn to the Christian faith in the ancient world. One of the five was because: **They had found the way to live**:

 As an early sect, the Christian community was called “The Way.” These people had found Jesus, who was “the way, the truth, and the life.” They organized their community in such a way as to be available to those who were down and out. They had been taught by the Master that the last shall be first, and he who is greatest in the kingdom is least of all and servant of all. Their communal lifestyle was personally fulfilling and socially productive. (Scott Kelso, *Ice on Fire: A New Day for the 21st Century Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 149)

In addition, Edward Gibbon in his monumental “History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire” makes this statement relative to the new Sect called Christianity and their outreach to the poor:

 Such an institution, which paid less regard to the merit than to the distress of the object, very materially conduced to the progress of Christianity. The pagans, who were actuated by a sense of humanity, while they derided the doctrines, acknowledged the benevolence, of the new sect. (Julian seems mortified that the Christian charity maintains not only their own, but likewise the heathen poor.) The prospect of immediate relief and of future protection allured into its hospitable bosom many of those unhappy persons whom the neglect of the world would have abandoned to the miseries of want, of sickness, and of old age. (Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire: Vol.ll Constantine and the Christian Empire* (London, The Folio Society, 1984), 131)

Finally, in the real world our present culture, the value of private property and the notion of hard work are held up as almost sacred concepts. Yet for Luke, the author of the book of Acts, the Kingdom of God is the real world where a “community of goods” is shared and class division is dismantled under the power of the Holy Spirit. Upon arriving at this destination, one can truly glimpse the Glory of God. May we be that people in Columbus and Central Ohio. Selah!