

Rise Up And Build

"So They said, 'Let us rise up and build,' Then they set their hands to do this good work," Neh. 2:18

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“Purpose of Heart”

When we are first introduced to Saul of Tarsus (who became Paul the apostle to the Gentiles), he is *“a young man,”* at whose feet the witnesses laid down their clothes when they stoned Stephen to death (Acts 7:58-60). Luke, the inspired historian, clearly stated that *“Saul was consenting”* to Stephen’s death, and he further stated that Saul *“made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison”* (Acts 8:1,3). In fact, the persecution against the church at Jerusalem became so intense that the saints (with the exception of the apostles) were *“scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria”* (Acts 8:1). However, *“those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word”* (Acts 8:4).

As we later learn, some of those who were scattered *“traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch preaching the word,”* and the Lord so blessed their labors that *“a great number believed and turned to the Lord”* (Acts 11:19-21). When news of these conversions reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. The record then states that *“when he was come and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with **purpose of heart** they should continue to serve the Lord”* (Acts 11:23).

This verse, Acts 11:23, reveals at least three very important facts: (1) Barnabas saw *“the grace of God”* — grace evidenced by those converts who were saved by the grace of God when they obeyed *“the word of His grace,”* cf. Acts 20:32. (2) Barnabas, having seen *“the grace of God,”* was *“glad”* — glad that sinners had become saints, glad that lost souls were saved. (3) Barnabas then encouraged these new converts that *“with **purpose of heart** they should continue to serve the Lord.”*

The admonition to “continue to serve the Lord,” and to do so *“with purpose of heart,”* implies at least two significant facts: (1) It is possible for those converted to the Lord to depart from the Lord. Cf. Heb. 3:12. (2) In order to *“continue to serve the Lord”*

it is necessary that one be possessed with “*purpose of heart.*” In the balance of this article we shall focus on that which is signified by “*purpose of heart,*” and how this quality is so essential if one is to “*continue to serve the Lord.*”

“*Purpose*” is from PROTHESIS (Gk.) and it is used to denote both the purpose of God, and the purpose of humans. Concerning the purpose of God, Rom. 8:28 refers to those “*who are called according to His purpose,*” and Eph. 3:10-11 mention the church which reflects His “*eternal purpose.*” God, Who purposed, had a plan; He was firm, fixed, and settled with regards to what He would do in effecting the scheme of redemption, and He never veered or wavered from the pursuance of those noble intentions. Concerning the purpose of humans, Barnabas exhorted the new converts at Antioch to have “*purpose of heart*” (Acts 11:23), and the apostle Paul later referred to the “*purpose*” which had characterized himself in the midst of “*persecutions and afflictions*” (2 Tim. 3:10,11). Barnes, in his **Notes on the New Testament**, defined **purpose** as a “fixed, settled resolution of the mind in regard to future conduct.”

But Please note that Barnabas exhorted these brethren to have “*purpose of heart.*” The Bible “*heart*” is not the muscle that pumps blood. Instead it is the center of the personality. The Bible “*heart*” includes the intellect (Matt. 13:15), the will (Heb. 4:12), and the emotions (Matt. 22:39). Hence, we read of the “*thoughts and intents of the heart*” (Heb. 4:12); we “*love*” with the heart (Deut. 6:5), and each one is to give “*as he purposes in his heart*” (2 Cor. 9:7). Yes, the religion of Jesus Christ involves the heart, and it requires “*purpose of heart.*”

One who has “*purpose of heart*” has his mind made up. He is fixed, firm, and resolute in his intentions. He is not like a “*reed shaken by the wind*” (Matt. 11:7). He is not wishy-washy, here-today-gone-tomorrow, and ready to throw in the spiritual towel the moment things don’t go his way, or when he imagines that he has been embarrassed, or ill-treated by another brother in Christ. To the contrary, he evidences faith in the **plan** of God, he pursues the **will** of God, and he is dedicated to the **cause** of God. “*In season and out of season*” (cf. 2 Tim. 4:2), when it is easy and when it is difficult, when some love him for his stand and when others despise him for his stand; he stands firm for the truth. He can be depended on to do what is right simply because right **is** right, and wrong is wrong!

Daniel was a Jew, a captive in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful king on earth at that time. Nonetheless, Daniel “*purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank*” (Dan. 1:8). Men of lesser conviction might have rationalized, saying to themselves, “I can not buck the system,” or “I must conform to the King’s rules in order to keep my head connected to my body.” But such rationalizing would violate the will God and be beneath the dignity of one who has “*purpose of heart*” in his determination to “*continue to serve the Lord.*”

By comparing Daniel 1:8 with Acts 11:23, we discover that “*purpose of heart*” is both negative and positive in its application. Negatively, Daniel “*purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.*” Positively, Barnabas exhorted the brethren that with “*purpose of heart*” they would “*continue to serve the Lord.*” It takes **purpose** of heart to say “**No!**” to illicit sex,

tobacco, alcohol, drugs, profanity, lying, and to all the “*works of the flesh*” both identified and condemned in Gal. 5:19-21. It takes “*purpose of heart*” to say “**No!**” to all human innovations in the work and worship of the church, and to every form of false doctrine. And it takes “*purpose of heart*” to say “**Yes!**” to personal evangelism, prayer, private and public Bible study, the work and worship of the church, to living “*soberly, righteously, and godly*” (Tit. 2:12), and to every scriptural attempt to further the cause of Christ.

Conclusion:

Brethren now-a-days are often swept up and carried away by the presence of those who exhibit personality, prestige, poise, and talent. But as it relates to the spiritual development, purity, and growth of the church, what is really needed is “*purpose of heart*” — a fixed determination to continue with the Lord. Talent alone often resides in people seeking two things — their own way, and their own glory! But “*purpose of heart*” or a fixed, resolute, unbending, determination to “*serve the Lord*” prompts one to do the Lord’s will and to glorify God in both body and spirit. Cf. I Cor. 6:20.

Friend, your eternal hope, as well as your real value to the cause of Christ, is proportionate to the strength and fixity of your “*purpose of heart*” — not to the effervescence of your bubbling personality!

*** — B. Witherington