

## Purpose of Heart

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What happened to the apostle Paul after he obeyed the Gospel? The book of Acts documents Paul preaching the Gospel in the synagogue in Damascus. The governor of Damascus tried to arrest Paul, but the Christians helped him escape (2 Cor. 11:32-33). Then, he went to Arabia for three years. Scholars speculate that he went to Mt. Sinai. Next, he visited Peter and James in Jerusalem for fifteen days. Afterward, he traveled to Syria and Cilicia.

Fourteen years later, Barnabas went to Tarsus looking for Paul. We do not know the details of these intervening years. Likely, Paul was working with his family making tents, studying the Scriptures intently, and preaching the Gospel.

The friendship between Barnabas and Paul is interesting. Barnabas had earned a reputation for being generous and encouraging. Paul was viewed with suspicion and skepticism due to his past persecution of the Church. Yet, Barnabas was willing to take Paul under his wing and work with him.

Barnabas took Paul to Antioch. A group of people had obeyed the Gospel. They needed help becoming grounded in the faith. For one year, Barnabas and Paul worked together to strengthen these new Christians. Being a new Christian is a time of vulnerability. If the Gospel is not nurtured in the life of a new Christian, he or she will fall from the grace of God.

The summary of what Barnabas and Paul taught in Antioch is simply stated; yet, rich in meaning for newer and older Christians. In this article, we will consider the importance of their message. Their teaching was summarized as follows:

“Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:22-23 KJV).

**1. Purpose.** What is our purpose? Some struggle to find their purpose in life. The Gospel instructs us in our purpose in life. In our new life, we are to bring glory to God. We do this as His recreated image-bearers. The Christians at Antioch were learning about how they were to serve this new purpose in all aspects of their lives. We must learn the same lesson.

Christians are to bring glory to God morally and ethically. The Gospel clearly defines the difference between right and wrong. Therefore, we must apply this standard to our character. Also, Christians are to bring glory to God in their families. In his letter to Titus, Paul explained how the grace of God produces a new household (Titus 2). When God’s grace transforms family members, the family collectively reflects the glory of God.

Christians are to live with purpose. We are to be intentional in our decision-making. We are to consider how our choices will serve the purpose of God’s grace.

**2. The heart.** Barnabas and Paul instructed the Christians at Antioch about the paramount importance of the heart. The grace of God is designed to reshape the hearts of sinners. Jesus once taught, “Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person” (Matt. 15:17-18).

The heart is a filter for what we are exposed to in life. If our heart is filled with lust and pride, our conduct will be sinful. If our heart is filled with the grace of God, our conduct will reflect the glory of God. Therefore, the heart must be properly trained according to grace.

Grace humbles and purifies our hearts. Understanding the gift of God’s love through Jesus will make us better Christians. When we are tempted to sin, God’s grace will restrain our hearts. Newer and older Christians alike need to be taught about the importance of the heart.

**3. Cleave.** As mentioned earlier, new Christians are vulnerable. They have not had time to grow in faith. The devil will take advantage of their inexperience. Therefore, teaching new Christians about cleaving is a logical place to start.

The action of cleaving involves two becoming one. The subject is typically discussed regarding marriage. However, the concept applies to Christians and their relationship with Christ. When a sinner obeys the Gospel, he or she becomes one with Christ. A new relationship is formed. And, this new relationship must be honored.

Cleaving involves commitment. New Christians tend to struggle with commitment. Commitment involves reordering our lives. This is difficult. New Christians are often tempted to return to their old life. For some, obeying the Gospel/getting baptized was an event. They think there is nothing left to do. Of course, obeying the Gospel is the beginning of a new life. Temptation, persecution, and unexpected trials can test our commitment to Christ. This is why we must learn about our purpose and reshape our hearts.

**4. The Lord.** When Moses appealed to Pharaoh to release the Israelites, Pharaoh arrogantly responded by saying, “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?” (Exod. 5:2). Jehovah, the Creator was Lord. In time, He made Jesus of Nazareth, Lord. God made Jesus Lord by raising Him from the dead and giving Him authority over Heaven and earth.

Obeying the Gospel is an act of submission to Jesus as our Lord. The life of a Christian is an act of subservience to Him. Jesus is to be Lord of our hearts. He is to be Lord of our families. He is to be Lord of our lives. Peter once declared that Jesus was Lord of all (Acts 10:36). We must have this truth imprinted on their hearts.

### **Conclusion**

With purpose of heart, we must cleave to the Lord. This statement is short; yet, encapsulates the essence of being a Christian. It conveys motive, action, and commitment. This

truth must be our guiding light as Christians. Reflecting on this will ensure our hearts are properly motivated and actions humbly honor our Lord.