

A WALK TO THE CROSS (And Beyond)

The First Church Born

Acts 2:42-47

The New Testament *molded the doctrine* for the life of the church. The **Book of Acts** traces the *application* of that *doctrine* in the history of the early church.

This passage describes the *historical workings of God* in the *birth of the first church*. It describes the new-born church when it possessed a *purity of devotion* to the risen Lord unmatched in succeeding generations. The life of this first church was *completely defined* by its unique *identity to Christ*.

Today, still nothing outside the *living Lord, the Spirit, and the Word* can define *life* for the church. Its purpose continues:

**Worship...Discipleship...Missions/Evangelism...Ministry/
Service...Fellowship...Prayer.**

I. THEIR SPIRITUAL APPETITE: (vs. 42)

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (vs. 42)...

This *one verse* basically *describes* the church and the *life manifested through it*.

The Church:

- Comprised of individuals who profess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. People who *repented* and are *saved*.

They...the *three thousand* who *repented* and *confessed faith* in Christ and were *baptized* (vs. 41). They showed *genuineness of their faith* by *continually devoting* themselves to *spiritual growth*...the sign of *genuine salvation*.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me."

~John 15:1-4

- A place where the Word of God is proclaimed...*as truth*.

"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

~John 17:17

God designed the church to be a place where His Word is *proclaimed* and *explained*. A commitment to the Word of God is foundational to the *growth* and *spiritual health* of every church.

"Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation."

~I Peter 2:2

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching (vs. 42a)...the believers continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching.

Continually...Gk. *proskarterountes*, means to *tarry, remain, or endure*...to *persist in* or *to be steadfast*. It refers to those who *repeatedly insist on something*.

"...If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine."

~John 8:31

A believer should count it *a wasted day* when he doesn't *learn something new* from...or isn't more *deeply enriched* by...the truth of God's Word.

Scripture is *food* for the believer's *growth* and *power*... and there is *no substitute*.

- **Where believers fellowship together**...and exhort each other to *holiness, righteousness, and faithfulness*.

And to fellowship...Gk. *koinonia*, means *to partner or share*.

Fellowship is the spiritual duty of believers to *stimulate each other...to partner or share with each other...to grow spiritually*.

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 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.”

~Hebrews 10:23-25

The Bible doesn't envision the Christian life as one *lived apart from other believers*. All members of the body of Christ are to be *active* and *intimately involved* in the local church.

Fellowship...was defined here as **the breaking of bread and to prayer**. The omission of an *“and”* between **fellowship** and **to the breaking of bread and to prayer**...indicates *the last two activities are equivalent to each other* in fellowship.

- **Where believers break bread together and worship together**.

To the breaking of bread...a reference to *the celebration of the Lord's Supper*. This isn't optional for the church since our Lord directed it and gave instructions as to how it was to be done.

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.”

~I Corinthians 11:23-26

The *Lord's Supper* acknowledges the *unity of believers* as they come together to *worship*.

The *Lord's Supper* also calls for *self-examination* and *purging of sin*...thus keeping the church *pure*. Nothing is more vital to the church than the *thoughtful expression of devotion* to the remembrance of the cross.

- **A house of prayer**...where *believers pray* together.

And to prayer...

The first church was *eager* and *persistently engaged* in the critical responsibility of **praying**.

“Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”

~John 14:13-14

The first church took the promise that God was the *source of provision* for all their needs...and they *relentlessly pursued* divine help.

The mention of prayer here, isn't only that of *individual believers*...but of the *church corporately*.

Sadly...**prayer** is probably the *most neglected activity* in the church today. The call to *corporate prayer* attracts only a faithful few. This is undoubtedly the reason for much of the *weakness* in the contemporary church. Unlike the early church...we have forgotten the Bible's *command to pray* at all times...and to be *devoted to prayer*.

“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.”

~Colossians 4:2

Prayer is *boring*...until it becomes *personal*. When it becomes *personal*...it will become *persistent* (fervent). When it becomes *persistent* (fervent)...it will be *powerful*. When it becomes *powerful*...God *will be glorified in the answer!*

II. THEIR SPIRITUAL CHARACTER: (vs. 43-45)

Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles (vs. 43)...

Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe...

Awe...Gk. *phobos*, refers to *fear related to the sense of divine presence*. It displays the *attitude of reverence*. It describes the feeling produced when one realizes God is at hand. It's used in Acts 5:5 and 11 to describe the reaction to the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira.

The life of the first church was so *genuine* and *spiritually powerful* that everyone...both those inside the church, as well as those outside the church...**kept feeling a sense of awe**.

And many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles...

Wonders...Gk. *terata*, evokes the sense of awe. It's the response from *seeing and experiencing miracles*...*seeing and experiencing the supernatural work* of God.

Signs...Gk. *semeia*, *points to a divine truth*...and was used to *authenticate the truth and works* of the apostles. **Signs** were never intended to be *an end within itself*...they were *never intended for entertainment*...they were always designed to *point to truth*.

“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”

~II Corinthians 12:12

“How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”

~Hebrews 2:3-4

The apostles performed many such **signs and wonders** throughout the **Book of Acts** (Acts 4:30; Acts 5:12; Acts 6:8; Acts 8:6, 13; Acts 14:3; Acts 15:12)...just as Jesus had performed many **signs and wonders and miracles** during His ministry.

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common (vs. 44)...It was a *sharing* church. They not only possessed a *spiritual unity* but also a *practical oneness*.

This doesn't picture a *commune*...nor does it offer support for such a notion. Some in the fellowship had no doubt *lost their livelihoods* due to their profession of faith. The rest of the fellowship shared *to meet the needs* of those believers.

And they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need (vs. 45)...

The *selling of property* and the *common possession of the proceeds* may imply that the early church *expected the Lord to return soon* and *establish His kingdom*. This may explain why the practice wasn't continued at this scale.

And were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need...Holding everything in common wasn't *socialism* or *communism* because it was *voluntary* ([Acts 4:32, 34-35](#); [Acts 5:4](#)). Also, their goods *weren't evenly distributed* but were given *to meet needs as they arose*.

III. THEIR SPIRITUAL UNITY: (vs. 46)

Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart (vs. 46)...

They continued to use the **temple** since Jesus had claimed it as *His Father's house*...and they probably continued to do this until it was destroyed in **70 A.D.**

With one mind...again expresses the *unity* the first church experienced.

And breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart...They did more than just take the *Lord's Supper* together. They enjoyed *fellowship* and *meals* together in each other's homes.

Gladness...Gk. *agalliasis*, means *to rejoice*.

Sincerity...Gk. *aphelotes*, means *simplicity* or *smooth*. It means that *there were no stones of selfishness in their hearts*.

IV. THEIR SPIRITUAL IMPACT: (vs. 47)

Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved (vs. 47)...

Praising God...Gk. *ainountes*, means *to produce joy...to exalt and glorify*. Joy comes to those who *give God glory*.

These words are used only *nine* times in the New Testament...*seven* of them by **Luke**:

- **Luke 2:13, 20**...*by the angels and shepherd at the birth of Jesus*.
- **Luke 19:37**...*by the people at Jesus' triumphal entry*.
- **Luke 24:53**...*by the people after Jesus' ascension*.
- **Acts 2:47**...*here...the establishment of the church*.
- **Acts 3:8-9**...*by the lame man when he was healed... and by all the people who saw him walking*.
- **Romans 15:11**
- **Revelation 19:5**

"Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."

~Philippians 2:1-2

Having favor with all the people...They were still going to the **temple** and *being open about their faith*...and all could *see* and *experience* their *transformed lives*.

In verses 47, Luke gives the *first of seven summary progress reports* of the church's growth (**Acts 6:7; Acts 9:31; Acts 12:24; Acts 16:5; Acts 19:20; Acts 28:30-31**).

And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved...the church *grew rapidly* from the start...both *numerically* and *spiritually*!

The **imperfect tense** of the verb translated **was adding**... along with the phrase **day by day**, indicates that people were *continually being saved* as they observed the daily *conduct* and *character* of the believers...and they were *being drawn to* Christ for *salvation* by their *witness* and *testimony*.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- The church is the **BODY OF CHRIST**...made up of redeemed sinners who have repented and received God's forgiveness. Yes, the church must reach out in love to those who do not know Christ. But no evangelistic purpose should ever be undertaken that alters what the church is by divine design...an assembly of saved worshipers pursuing *holiness* and *spiritual maturity*.
- A healthy church is a church that is **UNIFIED**... **JOYFUL**...and **SPIRIT-FILLED**...*fulfilling the purpose and design of the body of Christ*. Its witness is a powerful testimony to the truth and power of the Gospel.
- True evangelism flows from the life of a **HEALTHY CHURCH**.

ACTS 2:42-47

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