

INTRODUCTION

- One of the greatest difficulties of our being raised in a certain culture is that that it is difficult to see and understand our own presuppositions. What I mean is that there are some things that are so basic to the world in which we live that it is difficult to even see that we think in certain ways as opposed to not thinking in other ways.
- The words we speak with, the patterns of thinking that we use without thinking are so much a part of us that they are often woven into us in such a way that those ways of thinking seem like common sense to us, and to think otherwise seems absurd. This is true whether we live in Modern America, the jungles of Africa, the islands of the Philippines, or anywhere else in God's creation.
- In America have many of these which are so basic to our way of life that they are both difficult to recognize, and even more difficult to escape. I would like to suggest two that not only influence our way of thinking to things in general, but have also infiltrated the thinking of the Christian church. These two are an obsession with success and technique success (and both closely connected).
- What I mean by success is that what is good, right, true, helpful will be marked by large numbers of people following or believing in it. This is one reason for a never ending display of public polls and surveys. Whether it is a kind of soft drink, a pair of jeans, a song, a business, a book, a presidential candidate, a computer, lawnmower, Internet provider, movie, or a host of other things, a large following itself often defines what is "good" or right.
- What I mean by technique is that, when there is a lack of success, what is missing is a procedure by which something is accomplished. When there aren't large followings, what we need to look at is not necessarily the thing itself, but how to market it better, make it more accessible, more popular. One of the techniques itself is to find out what people want and then change the thing so that it becomes what everyone wants.
- Think about how this can work its way into the church. There is an assumption that bigger is better. A smaller group of intimate relationships where there is love and real interaction is almost assumed to be a failure. If God were blessing, there would be success in large numbers. If there is not this kind of success, then one of two things must take place.
- First, a change of technique. We must be doing something wrong in the presentation. We must market ourselves differently so that more people will be attracted. If this doesn't work, then there must be a change in the thing itself. We must be incorrect in what we believe, and so change it so that it is in conformity with more people, and thus we will grow in success.
- While we should certainly be desirous and burdened that many come to know Christ, and that the church flourish, I suggest that we should be very cautious of uncritically adopting these ideas of success and technique.
- We are explicitly told not to be conformed or pressed into the mold of the world's thinking, but be renewed in our thinking by God's Word Romans 12:2. This is where we should be very thankful that we have the Word of God in the Bible, and that we can always go there and have our mind renewed by it.
- What I would like to do this morning is to consider a passage which describes to us true biblical success and the way God worked that work in the early church. I do this so that we can examine ourselves not by the standard of modern day marketing or church growth standards, but by the Word of God.
- Our desire, above all things, is to be faithful to what the Lord has called us to do, and (in the words of Francis Schaeffer) to do the Lord's work in the Lord's way. What I would like to look at is what I will call the "Primitive Church."
- Definition (AHD): Primitive = Primary or basic. Of or relating to an earliest or original stage or state. Characterized by simplicity. Unsophisticated.

EXPOSITION – Acts 2:41-47

The Context

- The day of Pentecost, after the Lord's resurrection, the Spirit comes with power and the sign of tongues. It draws much attention, and Peter preaches a sermon about the Lord Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The result of this preaching was deep conviction over their guilt, and a crying out of what to do to avoid God's wrath.
- Peter commands that they repent from their sins and become a disciple (student-follower) of Jesus through the sign of water baptism (following the pattern of Jesus' earlier ministry). In v.40 he continues, and exhorts them to be saved from the crooked and perverse generation in which they lived. He does this with many other words (more than a "simple" Gospel motto).

I. Who Was Added To The Church? – v.41

- Those who received his word – through the preaching of the Gospel by Peter, they embraced the reality of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Gladly – they did not do so under constraint, coercion, or force. They heard the good news of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, and they were glad to hear of it and accept it.
- How were they added? - Through baptism. This was the visible sign and expression of commitment to the disciples of Christ. We are told that those who receive the word (presupposing understanding and acceptance) were baptized. This is one reason why we are theologically "Baptists", or believer's baptism (even after "children promise).

- That day...about 3,000 added – there is some question as to whether “that day” means that exact day, or that period of time. Regardless, there was a large influence of the Gospel unlike anything during the earthly ministry of Jesus. This marks the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in a most unusual way.

II. What Were Their Continuing Activities?

A. A Steadfast Continuance – v.42

- They –those who had received the Word and were baptized.
- Continued steadfastly – devote oneself to, keep close company with, associate closely with. Illustration: a personal assistant attending to the needs of the one who is being served.
 1. **To Apostolic Teaching**
 - Teaching (Gk. didache) – instruction, content of information. When the Apostles taught, they were present and attending and hearing their words. They realized that as disciples they were following the teachings of Christ through His representatives. They were not indifferent to sound teaching, but saw biblical teaching as essential to their growth as believers.
 2. **To Christian Fellowship**
 - Fellowship (Gk. koinonia) – association involving close mutual relationships and involvement. The church wasn't for them a group of occasional meetings, but an integration of one another's lives in frequent relationships.
 3. **To the Lord's Supper**
 - The breaking of bread – this phrase probably includes both the eating of a meal together and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This grew out of these close relationships, and sharing a meal together with something very intimate, and a constant reminder of the Lord's sacrifice for them in the giving of His body.
 4. **To Prayer**
 - Prayer – Prayer was not an occasional activity, but something they were constantly engaged in together. They met together before the throne of God and offered up petitions and requests and praises.

III. What Was the Result of the Church's Activities? – v.43-46

A. Fear – v.43a

- Fear came upon every soul – This could either refer to the disciples themselves, or to others. I'll opt for the disciples, as it uses the same term back in v.41. This is not fear in the sense of dread, but the activities deepened their sense of awe for God in worship of Him. Their learning more about God and the Gospel did not do away with this fear, but made it more profound as they worshipped Him in daily life.

B. Apostolic Signs – v.43b

- Many wonders and signs were done through the apostles – as the apostles continued to spread the news of the resurrection of Christ, their first hand witness that miraculous event was confirmed through the 12, and miraculous signs and wonders, including bona fide healings. This is also seen in 4:33 and 5:12.

C. Christian Charity -v.44-45

- All who believed were together and had all things in common – this was an unusual time in the church, as the feast of the day of Pentecost extended itself, and most of the disciples remained in Jerusalem. This caused an unusual amount of responsibility and burden to care for those who needed places to stay and food to eat. Some of this is created by the fact that this is the birth of the church, and the recognition of the special place of the apostles in the founding of the church. The church would later be scattered, but for now this is an extended time of teaching.
- Their response to those burdens are a voluntary and sacrificial giving to those who had need. It was voluntary in that it was not the establishment of a forced Christian commune, and certainly not communism. It wasn't that they sold everything they had and gave to the leaders, but rather as there was genuine need there was distribution.
- They sold their possessions and goods – while there is not a communist philosophy being forced, there was a certain care and concern for all that was in the hearts of God's people. If someone had need, they were moved by love and care for individuals to do good to them. This is a mark of genuine Christianity that doesn't just move in the realm of the “spiritual”, but cares for the physical needs of others.

D. Public Worship – v.46a

- This unity of worship continued as they were in the city of Jerusalem, and in those particular circumstances they had the ability to meet for daily in the temple (the only place large enough for such a gathering and teaching).
- Don't miss the point that once they “got Jesus” they didn't need anyone else. Here, as in the other parts, we see a community setting, learning together, serving together, loving one another.

E. Personal Relationships – v.46b

- Once they had their meeting in the temple, they weren't done with one another. There was also a breaking bread from house to house, showing ongoing hospitality, love, and kindness in relationships with others.

F. Glad Contentment – v.46c

- Even though they were giving generously to others, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart. They were happy to share their lives and their bread with the followers of Christ. This word "simplicity" means a humility associated with a simplicity of life. They didn't grumble about the food their guests ate, the loss of privacy, the frequency of visits. They were glad to "cut off the fat" from their lives and spend time together.
- This was what was in their "heart." It wasn't merely a sense of duty that they knew they should do this, but their heart was humble before God and one another.
- Let me mention here that these relationships would include those things that we find in our relationships when they are real. This includes sinning against one another in various ways, forgiving one another, learning to confess their sins. These weren't plastic pretend Christians, but real people living among one another according to the principles of the Gospel.

G. God-Centered Worship – v.47a

- In doing all this, we are told they were "praising God." They were aware of God's presence among them and their worship was toward Him. That which fueled their ability to love and live in this way was a life of worship before their Creator and Redeemer.

H. Cultural and Evangelistic Influence – v.47b

- They were having favor with all the people – we are not told of evangelistic crusades, political movements, great endeavors to change culture, but rather out of these few simple things there was real cultural influence. They lived among people who saw their lives, their interactions, and it brought favor and grace.
- They didn't always like what the Christians were saying, but they knew by their love for one another that they had something special, and that they were followers of Jesus Christ.

IV. What Was the Lord's Response to These Things? – v.47c

- Growing out of these basic things, very simple and unsophisticated things, God blesses them. It wasn't through their striving to be "successful" or the use of marketing techniques, but through God-honoring and neighbor-loving lives that God smiled upon them and saw a healthy place to put new believers.
- When God doesn't seem to be adding regularly to a church, some of the first questions asked are "what is our music like?", "how are we dressing?", "are we 'relevant' enough?", "is there too much preaching?" The first thing the church should be asking is "are we doing the Lord's work the Lord's way?" Are we striving after these things that we've seen this morning?
- The techniques of the world often work, with a change of the message (the only positive of Joel Osteen), the change of style (becoming hipper). It can add to a church, but we must ask if that is the same thing as the Lord adding to the church those who are being saved.

APPLICATION

- What is our "vision" for this church? What do we want to accomplish? Here it is. Plain, simple, unsophisticated. While it may be proper to ask some secondary questions, we should ask these more fundamental things.
- Do we have these? Then we are a blessed people. Do we need to increase in them? Then let us ask the Lord's help as we do so.
- Whatever we have, apart from these things are secondary, but if we don't have them then we are not reflecting the Apostolic church.
- Will we compromise for the sake of numbers? Will we be faithful to God's call, and praying fervently He would add as many as are being saved?
- God in His providence is taking away from us. Should we not ask ourselves the question as to why this is?
- Perhaps it is a judgment from Him to help us examine ourselves where we may be failing.
- Perhaps it is a test of our faith whether we will be faithful to these things or give into other techniques for success.
- These things are what the disciple of Jesus should love.
- I want you to be added if you are not a disciple.
- Today we are baptizing our sister Mandy, and she is being added to the church. By the testimony of her lips these are the kinds of things that have attracted her. Praise to the Lord that that is so.