

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #8

Acts 2:39-47

Last time we saw that there was an amazing response to the message preached by the Apostle Peter. The people were stabbed in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and wanted to know what they should do. Peter said you need to change your thinking about Jesus Christ, and about the fact that you are a sinful nation who does not have the righteousness necessary to get the Kingdom. You need to be baptized acknowledging that, and then you will receive the Holy Spirit.

Today, the reception of the Holy Spirit occurs at the moment one believes (I Corinthians 12:13). It is in harmony with repentance, belief, and forgiveness of sins. Any who will believe on Jesus Christ will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Peter kept preaching truth. He didn't say, all right, since you have asked what should you do - let's all bow our heads now and say a sinner's prayer. What he did was he kept preaching and he reveals three more important things, including dispensational theology early in the church.

There are three doctrinal points he reveals here to Israel:

(Doctrinal Point #1) - He reveals that Israel has promises specifically for her. **2:39a**

There is a promised program for the children of Israel in the plan of God.

(Doctrinal Point #2) - He reveals that people who are far away will also be called by God to Himself. **2:39b**

When this program of God was done, there would be more than just Jews in it. God would call people from far away into His family and this includes us.

(Doctrinal Point #3) - He reveals their need to be saved from this perverse generation. **2:40**

The word "perverse" means bent, crooked, perverse. This generation did not lead people straight to God through Jesus Christ. These people needed to cut themselves off from Christ-rejecting Israel. As H. A. Ironside said, the wrath of God was hanging over this generation and these Jews needed to believe on Christ and break away from this group. I believe the repentance baptism, which the nation had rejected, was a critical moment because this was the moment when those who truly believed identified themselves as sinners and were believing on Jesus Christ. When the people heard this, they received his word and were baptized and were saved. What we see here is this:

GOD BEGAN HIS CHURCH BY USING HIS PREACHED WORD TO DRAMATICALLY SAVE PEOPLE AND CHANGE THEIR LIVES.

Notice that **verse 41** says about 3000 souls were added. Added to what? Added to the Church, the family of God. After one message the Holy Spirit saved 3000 people. Now in many ways this church is a model church because it is the first church. It was a Jewish church and an inner city church. There are four main saved responses:

SAVED RESPONSE #1 – There was continual devotion. **2:42**

Notice there are four objectives of the initial group of believers:

Steadfast Objective #1 - These Jews devoted themselves to apostolic teaching. **2:42a**

Now keep in mind these are Jews who are used to being taught by the scholarly, trained religious leaders of Israel. There were the Pharisees and Scribes and the priests who loved to teach. The problem is, as the famed theologian Jack Nicholson once said, they “couldn’t handle the truth.”

Dr. Ironside said this group of 3000 Jewish converts was not the kind of group that went into some prayer room and bowed down and confessed sin and repeated a sinner’s prayer to receive Christ and then take a little literature home to think about their next move (*Acts*, p. 75). They wanted to know the Word of God. **One of the real marks of a Spirit-filled church and Spirit-filled believer is that there will be an intense desire to study and learn the Scriptures.**

As soon as these people were saved, they wanted to know the Truth of God. In fact, they devoted themselves to that objective. The word “devote” (προσκαρτερεω) means they were strongly focused and steadfast in this continual objective (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 385). These Jews realized they hadn’t been taught properly; and now that they were truly saved, they wanted to know the Scriptures. **By the way, notice they did not want to speak in tongues like the apostles; they wanted to know God’s Word like the apostles.**

It is interesting to me that the word “teaching” (τη διδαχη) is one that indicates there was a form of systematic teaching and instruction that the apostles were giving (*Ibid.*, p. 114). So these apostles were not just sharing their personal stories of the memories they had about Jesus. They were not just telling these people all they had seen God do in their own lives; they were actually giving doctrinal and Biblical instruction to these new believers.

This is critical because there are three views as to the kind of succession today’s church has:

- 1) Some claim there is an ecclesiastical succession - their church may be traced back to this one.
- 2) Some claim there is an Episcopal or leadership succession in that their leaders may be traced back to the apostles.
- 3) This text claims there is a doctrinal succession in that there is a succession of apostolic teaching and doctrine. This is the best kind of succession to have. True New Testament church succession continues in the study of the Word of God and doctrine taught by the apostles. That is what the first church did.

I believe this is one of the first things that happens when one gets right with God - they are passionately driven to understand the Scriptures. One of the great indicators that you are right with God is you want to know God’s Word - every book of the Bible and every doctrine. It is important to see that to “rightly divide” Scripture, it must be filtered through apostolic, Grace Age instruction. James Montgomery Boice said, “A Spirit-filled church is always going to be a Bible-studying church.” Wherever God’s Spirit has powerfully worked and blessed a church the Bible is carefully studied (*Acts*, p. 56-58). Kent Hughes said “Where the Spirit reigns, a love for God’s Word reigns” (*Acts*, p. 47).

Steadfast Objective #2 - They devoted themselves to fellowship . **2:42b**

This is the first use of the word “fellowship” in the N.T. This word does not refer to some sentimental fuzzy warm feeling. This word “fellowship” (κοινωνία) means there was a real communion and sharing taking place between these believers. The particular bent of this Greek word would indicate that this mutual sharing meant that each believer was contributing to the welfare of the group (*Ibid.*, p. 251).

Someone has observed that the stronger your vertical relationship is with God, the stronger your horizontal relationship will be with your brothers and sisters in Christ. You may convince yourself and some others that you are really spiritual by your isolation from the group, but you will never convince the Holy Spirit.

Steadfast Objective #3 - They devoted themselves to breaking bread . **2:42c**

Many believe this is a reference to the sharing of the Lord’s Supper due to the fact that the Greek reads “the breaking of the bread” referring to something very specific. Some have wondered why on Communion Sunday we actually have the congregation break the bread. It is identified by this very action. This group of Jewish believers were doing this because they now realized the value of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Steadfast Objective #4 - They devoted themselves to prayer . **2:42d**

The early church was a praying church. J. Vernon McGee said “the greatest asset of any church is prayer” (*Acts*, p. 521). The early church realized the importance of prayer, even when God was doing amazing and miraculous things. The particular word used for prayer (προσευχαις) is the word that emphasizes reverent movement toward God. There was a very reverent spirit among this group as they were moved to pray. (For a discussion of this word see *The Doctrine of Biblical Prayer* by Pastor David E. Thompson, p. 25).

There are probably some here today who think they have communion with God, and they don’t need to go to hear God’s Word or fellowship with God’s people or ever go to a prayer meeting. You will have a hard time convincing the Holy Spirit of that reality; because when the Holy Spirit is powerfully at work, there is a sense of communion with God and each other.

SAVED RESPONSE #2 – There was a continual sense of awe in what God was doing with the apostles. **2:43**

There is a legitimate emotion called “feelings.” In this context, the feeling was a sense of “awe.” That word “awe” means there was a reverent fear of God. Notice carefully the signs and wonders were taking place **“through the apostles.”** God did many things specifically through the apostles.

There is no record at all that God did these things through all the believers. He did these “sign” things through the apostles. Those signs were designed to show that they were men of God and they were communicating the truth.

When God's Spirit is at work in a person's life, there will be a reverent fear and awe of God and His Word and His work.

SAVED RESPONSE #3 – There was a continual sense of unity among all believers.
2:44-47a

These members of the early church were not a bunch of ascetic hermits who gave up food; they were joyful and glad to get together with their new brothers and sisters in Christ.

A relationship with Jesus Christ will change your social life forever. You will lose most of your old friends and you will enter into a new family who will really care about you. There were no age distinctions, gender distinctions, race distinctions, social distinctions, marital distinctions - they were "all together." In the early days of the church, there was no sectarianism, no denominationalism. There was no fighting and no strife. They went to the Temple together, they went from house to house together, they ate meals together and there was a gladness and a sincerity in their hearts to everything they were doing. Notice that they were not going into bars and nightclubs trying to win the lost. They are worshipping, studying, fellowshiping.

There ought to be a sense in church that we are one family and not a group of subdivided categories. I have often wondered what the real spiritual value actually is of having various isolated group gatherings. Some places feature a singles group, a divorced group, a suicide group, a formerly addicted group and I don't see that in the Bible. What actually began the Church Age was a church family who cared about each other.

There was a mutual sharing and caring in Jerusalem, a taking of meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart. People actually sold their property and possessions to share them with any who might have a need.

Verses 44-45 have been used as a support to promote everything from communism to socialism. Now we need to speak about this for a moment. Communism is a compulsory government forced sharing of goods based on the idea that no one has the right to own anything. It has nothing to do with generosity. Socialism acknowledges that one may privately own things, but it governmentally demands that the one who owns things gives them away when they are above a certain figure. The truth is the United States is very socialistic. Whenever we force a tax on someone because they have more than someone else, we are socialistic. We take from them to redistribute their wealth. They do not get to do this willingly; they are forced to do this.

Now this is not what happened here in Acts. There is no religious or secular government involved in Acts 2 in any way. **This was not communism or socialism; this was something that was done in a very voluntary way.** This was not manipulated by a minister or by a government; this is something some people of the early church did on their own.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said there is no question that "the gospel does penetrate the economic realm, and it should have its effect upon economics" (*Acts 2:41-47*, p. 8). There is no way one can actually be led by the Holy Spirit and be a stingy person. God's people who are led by God's Spirit have generous hearts.

However, there is no place where believers are commanded to do what happens here. There is absolutely nothing wrong with owning property. In fact, if you carefully look down through this context you will see that many of these believers still kept their homes (**i.e. Acts 2:46**).

The right of owning something and doing what you want with it is a Biblical right that was even taught by Jesus Christ (Matthew 20:15). The Apostle Paul does not command wealthy people to sell everything and give it away; but he does say they should not be conceited about their wealth, and should keep their faith in God and do good things (I Timothy 6:17-19). After all “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

SAVED RESPONSE #4 – God was saving people every day. **2:47b**

Not one dime was spent on an evangelistic advertising campaign. There were no organization committees created to figure out a marketing strategy. There is no record of them going door-to-door to the unsaved in some evangelistic movement to try to hand out tracts and invite people to Christ. They were focused on truth and fellowshiping with one another and God was just sovereignly saving. God was adding to their number daily. God’s Spirit was tracking people down and saving them and bringing them into this church.

This first church was praising God and having favor with all kinds of people and God was saving people. Initially the church was not persecuted; it was applauded.

Notice who was doing the saving - God. God was adding to the number. The apostles weren’t saving people and the recently saved people weren’t saving people, God was.

Now undoubtedly these believers were talking about their new faith. They must have shared the fact that they had come to understand who Jesus Christ was, whom they had crucified. However, the emphasis of this text is that they were studying and praying and fellowshiping and God was saving people.

We must make certain that we do not try to take credit for something God is doing. We don’t add to the church, God does. It isn’t our skill and ability and eloquence and power that builds God’s church; He builds His own church.

How do we know if we are really Spirit-filled or a Spirit-filled church? Five questions:

- 1) Do you love to learn God’s Word?
- 2) Do you love to fellowship with God’s people?
- 3) Do you willingly share with God’s people when you see a need or have opportunity?
- 4) Do you love reverent worship?
- 5) Are you driven to pray?