

The Acts of the Apostles

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Title: **“And they continued steadfastly...”**

Acts 2:36-47

³⁶ "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

³⁷ Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?"

³⁸ Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

⁴⁰ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." ⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*. ⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. NKJV

The experience of seeing someone repent and trust in Jesus Christ is perhaps the most thrilling thing that ever happens to me. That experience for me is rare, no doubt, because of my failure to witness at every opportunity, but nonetheless it has been my privilege to see several people that I believe the Lord used me as the earthen vessel to bring the Gospel to them.

What about on the Day of Pentecost? About three thousand souls heard the Gospel in their own language, the Holy Spirit granted them repentance, and they believed in Jesus Christ and they were baptized!

In the span of just one day, Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, brought more souls into the Kingdom of God than in His entire public ministry. That in no way disparages the public ministry of Jesus, it is just an observation of the fulfillment of a promise.

Jesus told His disciples that as a result of His returning to the Father, that they would do greater works than He had done.

John 14:12-14

¹²"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do, because I go to My Father. ¹³ And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it*.

Cf. 2:38 "in the name of Jesus Christ..."

Also, Joel's prophecy {Joel 2:28} was explicitly fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. The proofs of its fulfillment were the sound of a mighty wind, visions of tongues of fire over those in the Upper Room, the ability to speak in languages not learned, and a boldness to witness the Gospel.

The result was about 3000 souls being "cut to the heart" in repentance and declaring their faith in Jesus as the Christ!

Remember that only a few days earlier many of the same 3000 souls had cried out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Yet another miracle occurred when this diverse, multi-cultural, multi-racial crowd came together as a loving community around Jesus Christ. It's hard enough to get members of the same family to get along and love each other, but here it involved people from about thirteen different ethnic backgrounds.

Peter had preached that Jesus of Nazareth, the Man they crucified, had risen from the grave and that He was alive. Peter's argument, when he quoted the Psalms, was that David was still in the grave so David could not have been referring to himself. But Jesus of Nazareth, whom they crucified, had been buried, and now He is alive! Not only that but Jesus has ascended into heaven and He has sent the Holy Spirit just as He had promised to do.

There are a number of lessons in the passage we have before us today.

Verses 36-47 will teach us all we need to know about how a sinner can be justified from his guilt and be saved.

This is where many preachers confuse cause and effect when they make the effect of being saved the cause of being saved, e.g. baptism

There is the sovereign choice of God; there is the promise of God; there is the calling of God; there is conviction of sin; there is repentance; there is obedience in faith; there is commitment to the church; there is fellowship; there is praise of the blessing of God!

And the first cause when anyone is saved is always God:

And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

There is what is called in the Scripture the “remnant”.

REMNANT

(rem'-nant): Remnant is the translation of *yether*, "what is left over" ... "remnant" has a special significance in the prophecies of Isaiah, as denoting "a holy seed," or spiritual kernel, of the nation which should survive impending judgment and become the germ of the people of God, being blessed of God and made a blessing Paul, in Rom 9:27, quotes from Isa 10:22 f, "the remnant (*kataleimma*, "what is left over"] shall be saved";

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The definition of remnant is “what is left over.”

Out of the entire race of fallen men and women, out of the natural offspring of Adam, God, before there was anything but God, God set His affection on a remnant of the human race.

Three thousand of the “remnant” turned from a perverse {corrupt, crooked, untoward, evil, wicked} generation to faith in Jesus Christ.

No matter how corrupt society may be in any generation there will always be a “remnant”. God will always have His witness as long as this present age continues.

There was a remnant before the flood; there was a remnant living in Sodom; and there was a remnant of those who came out of Egypt.

Regarding the remnant, Paul, in Romans 9:27 quotes from Isaiah 10:20-23:

Isaiah 10:20-23

²⁰ And it shall come to pass in that day

That the remnant of Israel,

And such as have escaped of the house of Jacob,

Will never again depend on him who defeated them,

But will depend on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

²¹ The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob,

To the Mighty God.

²² For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea,

A remnant of them will return;

The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness.

²³ For the Lord GOD of hosts

Will make a determined end

In the midst of all the land.

Surely Isaiah refers to the return of the remnant to the land. But then Paul gives the NT spiritual interpretation to an OT prophecy.

It is typical for a NT writer to take an OT prophecy that surely appears to be about the return of Israel to the land, and while that may have been the first meaning, to then make a NT application to the church.

Romans 9-10-11 is about the church! In Romans 9, 10, and 11 Paul defines the Israel of God, as the church; as Gentiles and Jews together in the same body.

Romans 9:27-28

²⁷ Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel:

"Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea,

The remnant will be saved.

²⁸ *For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness,*

Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth."

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul says that Isaiah was shocked [Isaiah also cries out...] to proclaim that it was the remnant that would be saved and not Israel after the flesh:

For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, Rom 9:6

James does the same thing in Acts 15:16 by quoting Amos 9:11.

We will hold any further comments about this NT spiritual interpretation of an OT prophecy until we get to Acts 15.

Here in Acts 2, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter is proclaiming that Jesus was not the Messiah to the Jews only but also “to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” Those who are “afar off” are the Gentiles.

Eph 2:11-18

¹¹ Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – ¹² that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

How can anyone maintain that the Jews and the church are forever separate when the Bible clearly puts them together?

That completes the remnant that will be saved. The remnant is made up of Jews and Gentiles; and together they make up “what is left over.”

When this fraction of the remnant “continued steadfastly...” the New Testament visible church had its beginning. The universal church, all believers of every generation, OT and NT, had its beginning in the Garden of Eden but here is the start of the local church. Those who profess that Jesus is Lord begin to meet together for mutual encouragement.

They fitted into the Body 2:42

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The notion that a believer does not need to belong to and participate in a group of believers is foreign to the Scripture. With extremely rare exceptions, when someone is saved, the Holy Spirit guides them to a local church where they can participate and serve. You will not find a NT example of someone who has been saved trying to avoid the fellowship of other believers.

This same verse [42] gives us four necessary aspects of church life:

Viz. Scriptural teaching; fellowship; breaking of bread; and prayer.

First, there was the Apostle's Teaching:

A healthy New Testament church is committed to the authority and sufficiency of the Word of God both OT and NT. Notice that the number of souls who meet is not the measure of a healthy church. The largest church in America is void of Scriptural teaching.

Where those who Jesus warned are on the road to destruction? They are not only those playing "Bingo" [slot machines] on Sunday mornings they include those who are listening to false prophets tell them how God want them to be healthy and wealthy.

The authority and sufficiency of the Word of God includes the OT because about two-thirds of the NT is a commentary on the OT.

There were at least three kinds of public discourse practiced in the church.

1) There was the plain statement of facts: Just tell who Jesus is, what He did, and why He did it.

2) There was an explanation of the facts to help the believers understand the meaning of the facts. This would be expositional preaching; explaining the Scriptures. This is what I am trying to do now.

3) There was exhortation [encouragement] to help believers arrange their lives according to the basic doctrine or teaching and the explanation and application of the doctrine.

Second, there was fellowship.

The Greek word for fellowship carries a lot more meaning than having a meal after a meeting. We have our Fellowship Meal today after the services. But in the early NT times it meant communion, aid and comfort, and to have all things in common.

Over time the meaning of “fellowship” has diminished somewhat and does not convey its full meaning.

The spirit of community in the early church was one thing that set them apart from the rest of society.

John 13:34-35

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

Third, there was breaking of bread.

In the NT “breaking of bread” refers to sharing a meal.

The Jewish meal began with the act of breaking apart the loaf of bread.

Jesus began feeding the 5000 by breaking bread.

Luke 9:16

Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke *them*, and gave *them* to the disciples to set before the multitude.

Jesus broke bread to institute the Lord’s Supper.

Luke 22:19

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”

And Jesus broke bread when He revealed Himself after His resurrection to the disciples who were on the road to Emmaus.

Luke 24:28-35

²⁸ Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. ²⁹ But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them.

³⁰ Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.

³² And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" ³³ So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those *who were* with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ And they told about the things *that had happened* on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.

Jude calls the fellowship meals "love feasts".

Jude 12 These are spots in your love feasts,

Before there were buildings for the church to meet in the early Christians met in homes and the shared meal, the breaking of bread, was their custom.

The shared meal meant more for the early church than it typically does in our day.

It served as a means to feed the needy.

It served as a means of encouragement in times of persecution.

It served to remember the Lord's death and to look forward to His return. The shared meal usually ended with the wine and the bread of the Lord's Supper.

And fourth, there was prayer.

It is my opinion that this generation of Christians has almost lost the blessing of the prayer meeting. Vineland Park Baptist does not give priority to prayer as it should. This is not to scold anyone, unless I speak to myself. In years past we tried to meet on Wednesday night and have a "prayer meeting." We met and prayed together and then broke into small groups of two or three. That became so uncomfortable for us and the participation became less than what we have now on Wednesday night so we gave it up and went back to what we do now. We review and update our prayer list and someone offers a public prayer. Our prayer service takes about ten minutes and the main emphasis of the hour is on the bible study.

Do any of our sister churches have prayer meetings any more?

By this recount of our practice I am not proposing anything; just ruminating a bit.

As I have mentioned the Book of Acts records a transition from the Jewish worship in the temple and in the synagogues to Christian fellowship in rooms and homes.

For example, Peter and the other Jews did not immediately stop going to the temple to pray. It is certain they no longer offered a sacrifice.

Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*. Acts 3:1

Prayer was evidently the main part of the early Christian gatherings.

Acts 4:31

And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Prayer was essential for the encouragement of the church. Paul writes this:

1 Thess 5:12-22

¹² And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

¹⁴ Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. ¹⁵ See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies. ²¹ Test all things; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil.

Fear and Wonders 2:43

Acts 2:43

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

Our church services today are quite tame; so much so that even an “Amen” is rare.

Now we are commanded do all things decently and in order but a little enthusiasm would be welcomed.

One old deacon prayed, “Lord, let something happen that is not on the bulletin.”

It was very different in the days we read about in Acts. One of the upsetting factors was the change from the OT system of sacrifice in the temple looking forward to the Christ to memorial services remembering what Jesus Christ had already done.

Fear is awe and worship; not dread.

There is therefore now no condemnation... Romans 8:1

Reverence for what God was doing and there was daily evidence of the Holy Spirit’s activity through wonders and signs by the apostles.

What they did 2:44-47

This local church meets on Sunday and Wednesday. The first Christians met daily.

And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:47

A study of 1 Corinthians 12 gives us a fuller development of what the first Christians did when they met. We won’t turn to that Scripture but you might want to read it later today.

Here are just a few factors of how they worshipped together:

Caesar is not lord! Jesus is Lord!

In this time of the Roman Empire a citizen was required to worship the Caesar and call him lord. A person would be executed if they refused to so honor Caesar.

1 Cor 12:3

Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

The main thing the Christians agreed upon was the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Matt 18:19-20

¹⁹ "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Every believer was indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor 12:13

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body –

Eph 4:1-6

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

Surely I don't need to teach you again that this baptism is not water baptism.

Everyone was teachable. Meekness is one of the most important characteristics of a Christian. Blessed are the meek.

1 Cor 8:1-3

Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. ² And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. ³ But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

They needed each other. Acts 2:45

1 Cor 12:20-21

²⁰ But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

They shared their material wealth.

Acts 4:32

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

Acts 5:1-4

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. ² And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of *it*, and brought a certain part and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself? ⁴ While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

These scriptures show us two things about sharing:

1) They considered all that they had to be common property if there was a need; and, 2) the sharing was totally voluntary.

This was not "Christian Communism." There was no "law" or rule to share; they just loved one another and obeyed Jesus' instructions to do so with more than words.

James directly deals with sharing.

James 2:14-17

¹⁴ What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? ¹⁷ Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

What divine fellowship 2:46-47

The world had never seen anything like this kind of fellowship!

They were rejoicing that their sins had been forgiven; they were generous to the needy; they were simply Christians.

The Lord kept finding and adding those of the remnant to the church daily.

It is the Lord's business to seek out and add to the church. And He does that through the preaching of the Gospel.

It is the church's responsibility, those already in the body of Christ, to welcome anyone whom the Lord has saved.

And they continued steadfastly.....

If the Lord has spoken to you this morning about your salvation; if you need to confess your repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, ask one of the elders to counsel with you.

The message is the invitation; repent and believe in the Gospel.