

ACTS
The First Christian Church Of Jerusalem
Acts 2:38-47

Revival In Action. The first group of Christians ever to gather together to form a local church was in Jerusalem. This church was born out of true revival which only comes from God. Whenever true revival has come in the two thousand year history of the church, it has always been characterized by certain phenomena. First, God moves on the hearts of Christians to pray for their own spiritual condition and the lost condition of those about them. Second, Christians come under deep conviction about their own sins and the fragmentation of their lives with other Christians. Third, Christians have their hearts melted and opened to one another. They confess their sins of indifference to God and their coldness to fellow Christians. They begin to forgive one another, restoring broken relationships in love and graciousness. Fourth, God sovereignly moves upon the lost, bringing great conviction of sin, and many Christians and nominal church members are truly converted. Pentecost was the first Christian revival in that it was a revival from dead, cold, legalistic and traditional Judaism to dynamic life in Christ.

Review of Peter's Sermon. The Apostle Peter was preaching the first Christian sermon on the Day of Pentecost. He preached this message to explain to the Jews the supernatural phenomena which was occurring, the siren-like noise, the tongues of fire and the speaking in foreign languages by the disciples. This was all made possible by Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who sent the Holy Spirit to His church. Peter also preached that Jesus was both Lord and Christ. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ -- this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).

The person of Christ, according to Peter, was God, Messiah and Savior. The Jews at first did not want to hear Peter, but the more he preached the more God put the hearers under supernatural conviction. These unbelieving Jews were becoming aware that they had crucified the Messiah some fifty days before. They sensed they were guilty for putting Messiah to death, and, therefore, had stirred God's holy anger against them. Finally, they cried out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). These Jews were hardened just a short time before but now they cry out for help. Why? God supernaturally put them under conviction. He was softening them, convicting them, tugging at them, pulling on their hearts. They came to the place where they wanted to know how to be saved; how to get their sins forgiven and how to get connected up in a vital way with Christ.

FIVE MARKS OF A CONVERTED PERSON Acts 2:38-41

Repentant (2:38a). "And Peter said to them, 'Repent,'" -- These unbelieving Jews, cut to the heart with conviction of sin, cried out, "What shall we do?" Peter answered, "Stop sinning, turn over a new leaf, give up your old habits, do penitence, or crawl on your belly to the Red Sea!" No, Peter said, "Repent." Now don't let that word "repent" scare you. It does not mean to feel sorry or cry or weep, but to change the mind, to change one's thinking or attitude. Repentance is the very first phase of truly believing in Jesus Christ. These Jews may have thought of Jesus as a great teacher, a profound prophet and even an exceptional man with supernatural powers, but they were to change their minds about Jesus and accept Him as Lord and Christ. They had deluded themselves about Jesus as Messiah and they were to stop rationalizing and accept Him as Messiah, God and Savior.

When the crowd said, "What shall we do?" Peter did not reply by saying, "You do nothing. Salvation is all of grace and a free gift so just sit around and hope that God moves on you!" No, Peter said that these unbelievers had to do something. They had to repent, change their minds and attitudes about Christ and receive Him as personal Savior and bow before Him as their God.

Friend, have you been thinking everything is all right with you? Well, think again. You are a sinner and need Christ. Have you thought that Jesus was a good man, great teacher or profound prophet, but not God, Messiah and Deliverer? Well, think again. Change your mind. Get in line with the Son of God, who alone can save your soul from utter destruction in a godless eternity.

A converted man has a changed attitude about Jesus Christ. He accepts Him as personal Savior and God and deals with Him daily as his Lord.

Baptized (2:38b). “And let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins,” -- The second thing Peter told these Jews to do was to be water baptized. Water baptism is a public testimony of the inward reality of salvation. The word “baptism” in its secondary meaning means “identification” or “association.” These repentant Jews were to publicly associate themselves with Jesus Christ through baptism. For these Jews, baptism meant they were severing their ties with traditional Judaism and associating themselves with Jesus Christ and His people. Water baptism was the line of demarcation for it was the public testimony of commitment to Jesus as Lord, Christ and Savior. When a Jew submitted himself for baptism, he was cut off from the Jewish religious community so that he was considered a second-class citizen, had a hard time getting a job, educating his children, and was cut off from the cultural life of Judaism.

At first glance, Acts 2:38 seems to indicate that repentance and water baptism are both necessary for the forgiveness of sin. The Greek can help us out a little here, for it is possible to take the preposition “for” (heis) and translate it “because” (Matt. 12:41). This could then be translated, “Be baptized because of the forgiveness of sins.” Repentance was the means to forgiveness and baptism was the outward evidence of true repentance. Furthermore, in Acts 10:43, it says, “Everyone who believes in Him (Christ) has received the forgiveness of sins.” There is no mention of water baptism as a cause of salvation in Acts 10. Furthermore, if water baptism is necessary for salvation, this would be a work and the Bible is dogmatic on the fact that men are saved by grace and not by works. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (Eph.2:8, 9).

There is a radical group today called “the Jesus Only Group” who believe that unless a person is baptized in the name of Christ only he is lost. Such a doctrine, of course, is heresy. The explanation is quite simple. The Jew believed in Jehovah (God the Father) and accepted the Holy Spirit (God the Holy Spirit) but they rejected Jesus Christ (God the Son). They thought Christ was an imposter and a false prophet. When they accepted Messiah and were baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ,” they were acknowledging He was God, the second person of the Trinity. It is impossible for one to be saved unless he acknowledges Christ as Lord-God. “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

Acts 2:38 does not teach baptismal regeneration but it does teach the importance of water baptism. Baptism is the New Testament way to express faith in Christ. The public confession of one's faith in Christ was not walking an aisle, raising the hand, signing a card but by water baptism.

Called (2:39). “And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.”

(1) When a person repents and truly believes in Jesus as Lord, Christ and Savior (God, Messiah and Deliverer), he is saved, and at that moment receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not come through weeping, wailing, begging, tarrying but through changing one's attitude about Christ and believing Him to be Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit comes to make Christ real, living and dynamic to the Christian. Notice this says nothing about tongues but states the Holy Spirit comes quietly and silently to all who receive Jesus Christ. A truly converted person has the Holy Spirit indwelling him. “But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him” (Rom. 8:9).

(2) Peter told these Jews that the promise of forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit was to all Jews and their children who truly believe in Christ. However, the Holy Spirit is not only for Jews who believe but to those “far

off,” that is, Gentiles and their children who believe in Christ (Eph. 2:13, 19).

Notice carefully that the forgiveness of sins and the promise of the Holy Spirit are not the possessions of everyone but only those who are sovereignly called by God to salvation. This verse tells us plainly that a truly converted man has been effectively called by God to salvation. When we trust Christ, it is not so much that we find Christ but He finds us.

If we are believers in Christ, we can rest assured our relationship with Him was not started by us but by God Himself. He convicted us, drew us and called us to salvation.

Separated (2:40). “And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’” -- The K.J.V. is somewhat misleading and says, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation,” as if to imply that man had something to do with saving himself. This does not mean they could redeem their own souls. The word “save” can be translated “deliver” or “escape.” What Peter was saying is that these Jews were to “deliver themselves” or “escape” from that perverse generation by receiving Christ and following Him. The fate of that generation of unbelieving Jews was eternal damnation because of the hardness of their hearts.

Every generation is wicked in its own way and true Christians in every generation are to be separated from the evil of their day and separated unto Christ. Christians are to affect culture and not be affected by it. They are not to allow themselves to come under the influence of the habits, attitudes and practices of their present, godless, crooked society.

“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM: AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. THEREFORE, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE, SAYS THE LORD. AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN: AND I WILL WELCOME YOU. AND I WILL BE A FATHER TO YOU, AND YOU SHALL BE SONS AND DAUGHTERS TO ME, SAYS THE LORD ALMIGHTY’” (II Cor. 6:14-18).

The way to be a separate people from the world is to obey the Word, trust God's promises, and determine to walk a Spirit-filled life, giving Christ the first place in your life.

Teachable (2:41). “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

(1) There were three thousand people that day who responded to the preached Word and then they were baptized. Notice that they “received” or “welcomed” the Word. They had a responsiveness to scriptures. A truly converted person will have a desire to know and obey the Word of God. There will be a teachable spirit and a receptivity to divine truth.

(2) It is the Lord who adds to the local church not men. “And the lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). This is why we must never force, or beg, or scare people into uniting with a local church.

When the Holy Spirit saves a person, he will automatically want to unite with a group of true believers in Christ. As far as we know, there was no membership roll, but it was very obvious who were Christians and who were not. We cannot be dogmatic on a church roll and there may have been a church roll of some kind; there certainly is nothing unbiblical about a church roll if the membership is born again. We do know that these early Christians placed themselves under the Apostles and later the elders of the church for spiritual authority and guidance.

Every member a local church begged or scared into becoming a member, the church deserves, for obviously this is

not of God and they will not be happy or faithful to Christ or the local church.

(3) The Lord added to the one hundred twenty about three thousand souls. The visible, local church at Jerusalem mushroomed in just one day. They experienced a growth crisis but they also coped with the problem effectively. Acts 2:42-47 tells how to handle a growing church situation, so that when the body meets together there is life, warmth, concern and love among the brethren. Numbers in a local church should not be a deterrent to close fellowship if the Biblical pattern is followed.

FOUR MARKS OF A DYNAMIC LOCAL CHURCH Acts 2:42

Before we can demonstrate the marks of a dynamic local church, we should point out the foundations which made it a dynamic church. First, they had only born again believers in their local congregation. They only allowed those who truly repented, were baptized and separated unto Christ into that local body of Christians. Second, they were a new church and were not bogged down with years of tradition. They were, therefore, flexible and ready to try new things. Third, these people were of one mind. At this time, there were no denominations, doctrinal squabbles and petty sectarianism. Fourth, they were all excited about submitting to Jesus Christ as the Head of the church.

This was the ideal church and it is questionable whether it is possible to reproduce this same kind of a situation in every detail today. However, all local churches today should strive towards the ideal, seeking to make their churches conform to the New Testament patterns as much as possible.

Devoted to the Apostle's Teaching (2:42a). "And they were continually devoting themselves to the Apostle's teaching," -- The local church at Jerusalem continually devoted themselves to learning and doing the Apostle's doctrine or teaching. God commissioned the Apostles, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to instruct the church on how to live this life in the truth of Jesus Christ. We will never learn to understand ourselves, or the world around us, or the society in which we live unless we understand the Apostle's teaching.

The Apostles gave the church Apostolic teaching and this has been recorded for us in the New Testament. Apostolic teaching is still in the church today and the Apostles are still speaking to the church through the New Testament. There is no Apostolic succession of bishops or ecclesiastical organizations because men and organizations are open to corruption, perversion, heresy and apostasy. There is however Apostolic doctrine today which is inspired and infallible. It is only those who are continuing in Apostolic doctrine who are continuing in Apostolic succession.

Doctrine is important and must be preached and all teaching must come from the Bible only. Creeds and confessions must always be subordinated to the Word of God. The Bible must be our only creed. We should be reading in the Bible consistently. We should be developing a doctrinal taste. Doctrine is nothing more than what God wants us to know about Himself and His plan so that Christians can fulfill His will on this earth. It is impossible to live by truth you do not know. Right living depends upon right doctrine. People sometimes say, "Oh, I wish I could hear the Apostles preach!" You can. The Apostles are still preaching in the Bible. You can have an Apostolic Bible conference every morning by opening up your Bible and reading.

Never say doctrine is not important but experience with the Lord is what really counts! Doctrine is basic to a right experience with Jesus Christ. Doctrine which is not applied to living can be devastating but experience without doctrine will cause spiritual shipwreck.

The Bible and experience can be related viewing the Atlantic Ocean and actually crossing it with a map. A person can look at the Atlantic Ocean with its great expanse of water and have a grand experience of awe. But if we want to cross the Atlantic we would most certainly consult a map. A map at first may appear dry and dull, but it records the work and experiences of thousands of people. A map can tell us much more about the Atlantic Ocean than all of our experiences of looking at it. Furthermore, the map can get us across the ocean if we choose to cross it. The Bible is experiential. It is the record of the experiences of thousands of people who have first had contact with Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the Bible gets us to our destination for it is our map of life.

Devoted to Fellowship (2: 42b). “And to fellowship,” -- The word “fellowship” means “holding all things in common” or “sharing together.” These new Christians began to know and love each other. Most of the three thousand people were strangers and had come from various parts of the world. They did not know each other but suddenly three thousand one hundred and twenty were saved and had a wonderful bond in Christ. They began to love one another, to talk to one another, to pray for one another, to bear one another’s burdens and to meet one another’s physical and spiritual needs. There was a wonderful sense of community, of commonalty, of belonging to one another. They saw themselves as a family in need of one another as a body working with one another.

Devoted to Breaking of Bread (2:42c). “To the breaking of bread.” -- The breaking of bread is undoubtedly a reference to the Lord's Table, although a few scholars may disagree. These early Christians apparently remembered the Lord Jesus every day at first by partaking of the Lord's Table. As the church began to grow and spread out, it appears that the Lord’s Table was observed every Lord's Day. “And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight” (Acts 20:7). Did the partaking of the Lord's Table weekly become ritualistic and dry? Apparently not because they saw the Lord's Table as a time of worship with Jesus Christ. Part of their fellowship with one another was around the Lord's Table, which was designed to cause them to remember Christ. The Lord's Table (Eucharist) was taken at the end of an agape (love) meal where the Christians gathered for fellowship.

Devoted to Prayer (2: 42d). “And to prayer.” -- The First Christian Church of Jerusalem was a praying church. A praying church is always a productive and growing church. Apparently prayer was a way of life with these early Christians, for whenever they met, they prayed.

In the Book of Acts, there were no scheduled prayer meetings as such but this does not mean that scheduled prayer meetings are wrong. There was a spontaneity about the prayers of the first Christians which seems to be lacking in most prayer meetings in the modern church. For sure, a church or an individual Christian not committed to prayer is a church or a Christian not fully surrendered to the will of Christ.

Summary. These four marks of a dynamic church are essential if a local church is to make an impact upon this world for Christ. These marks are absolutely necessary if the members of a local church are to grow. Without them, we cannot grow. With them, we cannot keep from growing. When a local church is not teaching God's Word, fellowshiping, breaking bread, and praying, the Holy Spirit is grieved and the possibility of true revival is hindered.

SEVEN RESULTS OF AN ACTIVE LOCAL CHURCH Acts 2:43-47

Demonstration (2:43). “And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.” -- The early church lived in a great reverence and awe of what Christ was doing in their midst through the power of the Holy Spirit. They sensed the supernatural, mystical workings of God among them. They saw God at work among them. The element of the supernatural was very visible and it baffled them.

The wonders and signs were supernatural phenomena produced by the Apostles because they had the sign gifts which are no longer in existence with the passing of the Apostolic office. It may be that miracles were necessary for this young church because they were not as mature in Christ as they should have been. Physical phenomena is really never as important as the spiritual phenomena, but immature Christians often depend on visible things believing only what they can see. God wants to move His people from the physical and visible to the spiritual and faith realm. Physical phenomena are often the mark of an immature church. As Christians grow in grace, God moves them from the physical level into the realm of the spiritual.

Unification (2:44a). “And all those who had believed were together,” -- These early Christians had one heart, one mind, one goal. They were together. These believers in Christ were united. joined together in the bond of Christian love and unity. Their aim in life was to glorify and serve Jesus Christ period!

Participation (2:44b-45). “And had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone had need.” -- These early Christians loved each other so much they were willing to depart with their material goods to make sure the physical needs of a brother were taken care of. Undoubtedly after Pentecost, the Jewish religious establishment began to make it rough on Christians, so that it became difficult to get a job and be a part of the Jewish society as a Christian. Also many of the Jews from all over the Roman empire stayed in Jerusalem and did not have enough money to do so. There was, therefore, a need for a common fund. They established a pool and when one of the saints had need, the Apostles distributed monies to meet these needs. “For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of lands or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostle's feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need” (Acts 4:34, 35). It would be on the order of Grace Church's Emergency Help Fund only on a much larger scale.

The Scriptures do not say that all Christians in Jerusalem sold everything they had and put it into the common treasury. They sold “as the need arose.” Certainly, this verse does not teach that it is wrong for a Christian to own property or amass wealth. It only teaches that the early Christians did whatever was necessary to meet the needs of their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

This verse most certainly is not teaching Christian communism, for it was voluntary and not in any way forced. While this verse does not support communism, it does teach that the gospel did penetrate into the economic realm of believers so they were willing to depart with possessions for the cause of Christ.

This verse does not teach it is a Christian responsibility to take care of all the poor in the world. The Christians met the needs of their fellow believers and this made a terrific impact upon the unsaved world. Believers taking care of one another is according to the Old Testament, for the prophets were concerned about political and social action within Judah and Israel and not the world in general. Nowhere do we read of the Israelites establishing a poverty program for the Assyrians. In the New Testament, there is to be social concern first for believers in Christ, for true members of the body of Christ.

If a Christian brother has need, and we do not meet that need, God will bring down anathema upon us. This is true of all Christian brothers, not just those from Grace Church.

Adaptation (2:46). “And 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.” -- The early church was flexible and could adapt and change when necessary. They had three thousand one hundred twenty believers in Jerusalem so they met as one group in the Temple and also in smaller groups in the homes of Christians in Jerusalem. The large group broke up into smaller groups, probably an elder was assigned to each group. This is the divine method to maintain the oneness of a local church and at the same time create warmth, love, concern and sincerity among Christians.

Adoration (2:47a). “Praising God,” -- These early Christians were so occupied with a supernatural working Christ that they were a praising people. God was at work, glorified in the midst of His people, worshipped and praised because of His greatness and faithfulness.

This does not mean that these believers shouted, clapped their hands, or ran up and down the Temple aisles shouting, “Hallelujah!” A heart praising God is a heart full of thanksgiving to God. Because we do not all display the same outward emotional reaction, we do not all praise God in exactly the same way. We should never criticize another believer because he or she does not praise God exactly as we praise Him.

Reputation (2:47b). “And having favor with all the people.” -- The first Christians were not only happy and praised God, but they lived and conducted themselves in such a way that they found “favor with all the people.” This does not mean that they found favor with everyone in Jerusalem because the religious leaders felt threatened by Christianity, but they did find favor with the mass of people in general. When the outsiders saw the liberality of the saints, their simplicity of faith and that they really loved one another, the church found favor with the people.

This all happened before the church was institutionalized, before it became bogged down with power, pride, traditionalism, denominationalism and man-made rules. What was their secret? They were committed to Christ and to the Word of God, not to programs, not to manipulation, not to pleasing men, not to political and social reform, but to Christ, the Head of the church. The only church which will cause the unsaved world to stop and take notice is the church which is committed to the Apostle's teaching, fellowship, communion and prayer.

Addition (2:47c). “And the Lord was adding to their numbers day by day those who were being saved.” -- It is the Lord Jesus Christ who saves men and women and adds them to the church. All human membership gimmicks are worthless but God can and does move upon men to save them. When Christ adds a person to the local church, he becomes an active member in the body, doing the will of Christ. Unless the Lord adds to the church, nothing spiritually is accomplished.

CONCLUSION

Saved. Christian, do you want revival in your heart and in the life of your church? Then return to God's Word and be obedient to it. Give Christ the first place and become a person of prayer. Have you been indifferent to Christ? Tell Him! Do you need to settle some problem with another Christian, to forgive him, to clear up grudges? Settle these things immediately! Call up the person, go to the one you have offended or who has offended you and straighten the whole matter out, so that God's Spirit may move unhindered in your life.

Unsaved. Are you an unbeliever? God says for you to repent, change your mind about Christ, and be baptized and you shall receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ Himself said, “The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.” John Bunyan when under conviction of sin asked, “Who is the one?” The preacher replied, “Anyone who will come!” Christ accepts anyone who will come to Him. Do you feel you can't come because your sin is too great? Christ said, “anyone.” Perhaps you do not come because you do not have the desire to come. Christ can give you that desire if you will ask Him for it. Come to Christ, for the promise is to you and your children and as many as are far off.