

Acts 2:41-47, Life in the Early Church
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Overview

In the first part of the chapter, believers receive the HS under the New Covenant for the first time. It is the birthday of the NT church. Now we have a glimpse of their life together, the fundamental pattern for our life as we seek to follow the example that the Spirit has preserved for us. Note:

1. *Who* does what (the believers and the Lord);
2. In some detail, *what* the believers do;
3. *How* those around them respond.

A. 41, 47b: The Believers ... The Lord

Cf. the English expression, "On the one hand ... on the other hand." Greek has an analogous pair of expressions, and they are used in these verses, though they are far enough apart that you may miss them if you're not alert.

1. 41, On the one hand, the believers, those who received Peter's word, were baptized and integrated into the life of the assembly, on which more below.

What is "the other hand"? Sometimes Gk leaves it unexpressed, and we might be tempted to think of those who did not receive Peter's word, etc. But it happens that v.47 contains the other expression.

2. 47, On the other hand, the Lord continued to add people to the church.
3. *Application:* Two lessons here.
 - a) The first concerns respective responsibilities. It is the Lord's task to save and add to the church. Our task is to carry out the activities described in 42-47a. The Lord will indeed use those activities as he brings people to himself, but the critical issue for our attention is our faithfulness to the pattern here presented.
 - b) The second concerns our duty toward others who own the Lord as theirs. We are to receive them upon profession of their faith and water baptism. What God has cleansed, we may not call common. It is the Lord's responsibility to save; it is ours to receive.

B. 42-47a, What the Believers Do

1. Note that baptism comes first, in v.41. Water baptism is God's way of bearing testimony to what the Lord Jesus has done in your

life. It is the initiation into the church.

2. Luke goes on to record that they "continued steadfastly" in the four basic activities of the church. What does it mean to "continue steadfastly"? The verb describes
 - a) a chartered boat ready to receive the Lord, in Mark 3:9;
 - b) what the apostles wanted to do in prayer and preaching in Acts 6:4;
 - c) the relation of a personal bodyguard to his charge in Acts 10:7

It reflects *deliberate dedication*. They were dedicated to these activities; when the believers gathered together, they made it a priority to be there. And their dedication was deliberate. It's not just that they happened to run into each other every day in the temple. They planned their schedules to make it happen. The attitude here is that enjoined in Heb. 10:25, not to forsake the assembling together of the believers.

3. The four things are developed through an amplifying alternation. To the four activities of v.42 correspond 43, 44-45, 46, and 47a, respectively. These are the four activities that are to be carried out by those who have believed on the Lord Jesus and been baptized.

- a) 43, The apostles' doctrine. Cf. Matt. 28:19,20. This is the task to which the apostles, the "sent ones," were sent: to make disciples by first baptizing and then instructing people. So here those who have been baptized are now seeking instruction.

- 1) The link to v.43 is not through "teaching," but through "the apostles." The teaching is not mentioned explicitly, but the role of signs and wonders was to validate their authority (2 Cor. 12:12, "the signs of an apostle") and thus implies that teaching was offered concurrently.
- 2) The response of those who heard was "great fear," stimulated in this case by the signs and wonders. Specific example: death of Ananias and Sapphira, 5:5,11.
- 3) *Application*: The teaching of the apostles has been preserved for us today, in the words of the NT. Every book of the NT is written either by an apostle or by someone reporting for them (Mark for Peter; Luke for Paul). Like the early believers, we should

- a> deliberately dedicate ourselves to the corporate study of the teachings of the apostles;

- b> regard these teachings with holy fear, not treating them casually or flippantly, nor joking about them, but recognizing that they are the words of the One who can kill and make alive.

b) 44-45, Fellowship. Not to be confused with cookies and punch. The word is *koinwnia*, having things in common. In 44-45, cf. "had all things common," *koina*. Perhaps a better word would be "sharing."

- 1) Luke records for us that the early church in Jerusalem practiced communism. The story of Ananias and Sapphira in ch. 5 shows the detailed workings of their practice.
- 2) Should we do this today? 1 Cor. 16:1-2 shows that this was not a universal practice in the early church. There, Paul commands individual believers to maintain their own stocks for charitable purposes. Whether or not a church operated this way apparently depended on local need. We know from several other places (Acts 6:1-4; 11:29; 2 Cor. 8-9) that Jerusalem was a particularly needy congregation, and every bit of help was needed. In Corinth, the needs were more focused.
- 3) But the broader principle still holds good, that the believer's property belongs to the Lord and is at his call for the well-being of other believers. We are to dedicate ourselves deliberately to sharing our resources with needy brethren. According to 1 Cor. 16, it is the responsibility of each family to do this individually. Just because as a church we have minimal expenses does not mean that we do not believe in giving. Let every one of you lay by him in store.

The next two items, "breaking of bread" and "prayers," are embedded in a single long sentence whose structure repays some attention on its own. Note two participles [circumstantial], then one finite verb, then two more participles [manner, amplifying "with ..."]:

*continuing daily with one accord in the temple,
and breaking bread from house to house,
they ... did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of
heart,
47 Praising God, [prayer]
and having favour with all the people.*

c) The main activity with which breaking of bread and prayers is associated is eating their regular meals.

- 1) Significance of the common meal: a sign of covenant. Cf. Mephibosheth at David's table (2 Sam. 9:13; 19:28); Isaac and Abimelech (Gen. 26:30-31); David and Abner (2 Sam. 3:20); God and Israel (Exod. 24:9-11).

Then as now, societies often held their meetings around a common meal. Cf. service clubs (Kiwanis) or Toastmasters. The communion had originally been at the end of the passover meal, and 1 Cor. 11 reflects the early custom of taking the

Lord's Supper at the conclusion of an ordinary meal (though the custom was abused there). The scriptures do not command such a full meal as part of the Lord's Supper, and in fact Paul's remedy to abuses in 1 Cor. 11 is to satisfy one's hunger at home. But it is still clear that this was the practice of the early church, a means of charity to the poor and of deepening the bonds among them. This was the major meeting, a common dinner culminating with the symbolic elements.

We should eat together more often. To avoid abuse, note two characteristics of the table, amplified in the following ptcs:

- 2) *Gladness*. The remembrance of the Lord pervaded the entire meal, and they rejoiced together in thoughts of him. This is not the usual word for joy (*xara*), but a special term indicating joy in or before the Lord, religious joy, "the joy of our salvation." Reflected in "praising God."
- 3) *Singleness of heart*. Their simplicity. Etymologically, "unrocky," without anything to stumble or trip up anyone. Their conversation and conduct when they ate together was to be such as to build up, never offend, one another. We can be sure their conversation was around the Lord, not the latest scores from the coliseum or the current political debates. Reflected in the favor they enjoyed with the people. They were sincere and genuine.

d) Breaking bread

- 1) Part of the two preceding participles, which give the *circumstances* of their common meals.
- 2) Relation to "continuing daily in the temple": one aspect of "the apostles' doctrine" was no doubt their evangelistic ministry, of which we shall hear several examples in coming chapters. The church supported them in this. Evangelism is not a solo performance. Though one leads the conversation, the Lord always sent his people out by twos, for mutual support and encouragement. Example: our tracting session Saturday, when both couples went together; or our art fair activities.
- 3) The ceremony itself. 1 Cor. 11, sharing the bread and the cup in memory of the Lord. (Note that "breaking of bread" is broader and can refer to a meal in general; cf. Acts 20:7,11.

e) Prayers = Praising God

- 1) Part of the last two ptcs, which give the *manner* of their common meals, amplifying "gladness and singleness of heart."

- 2) Relation to "having favor with all the people": Christianity has two directions, one toward God, the other toward our fellow humans. We rightly criticize those who reduce Christianity to social activism without dealing with the problem of sin that separates people from God. But it is also wrong to ignore the needs of our fellow humans, or even justify them as the results of God's lack of election, while priding ourselves on our private line to heaven. Their singleness of mind, their sincerity, won the approval of their contemporaries.
- 3) They showed their gladness when they ate together by praising God. Praise (47) is more specific than prayer (42). In general, prayer can include four things, summed up under the acronym 'ACTS':
 - a> Adoration (here), praising God for who he *is*.
 - b> Confession, examining our own lives in the light of his word and seeking his forgiveness for our sins.
 - c> Thanksgiving, acknowledging what God has *done* for us.
 - d> Supplication, asking him for things, either for ourselves or for others (in which case it become intercession).

The emphasis here on adoration and praise in the context of the Lord's Supper suggests that this is the kind of prayer most appropriate to that occasion. But in general we would do well to dedicate more effort to adoration, confession, and thanksgiving. It is easy to come to God with requests, and we should by no means stop doing that. Let us supplement them with the other kinds of prayer, following the example of Bible prayers, that usually begin with worship and only then move to request.

C. **47a, How Unbelievers Respond**

Compare this refrain with Luke 3:53, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Note also how opposition later grew against the Lord, just as it did against the church. Recall Francis' comments on 1 Pet. 3:16 last week. When opposition comes, let it be because God has pricked peoples' hearts through his word, not because of ungodliness in our conduct. Our behavior should be without reproach.

Summary

1. Rejoice in the division of responsibility between us and the Lord.
2. Follow faithfully the pattern he has provided for us here.
3. See to it that our lives are free from offense toward those without.

Hymn: 230, I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord

Analysis

A.

1. 41-47, Correlative p (the believers vs. the Lord)

a) The believers:

- 1) 41 oi(me\n ou)^n a)podeca/menoi to\n lo/gon au)tou^
e)bapti/sqhsan,
 - 2) kai\ prosete/qhsan e)n th^| h(me/ra| e)kei/nh| yuxai\ w(sei\
trisxi/liai.
 - 3) 42 h)^san de\ proskarterou^ntes
a> th^| didaxh^| tw^n a)postolwn
b> kai\ th^| koinwni/a|,
c> {kai} th^| kla/sei tou^ a)/rtou
d> kai\ tai^s proseuxai^s.
 - 4) Apostolic preaching
a> 43)Egi/neto de\ pa/sh| yuxh^| fo/bos,
b> polla/ te te/rata kai\ shmei^a dia\ tw^n a)postolwn
e)gi/neto.
 - 5) Fellowship = sharing
a> 44 pa/ntes de\ oi(pisteu/ontes h)^san e)pi\ to\ au)to\
b> kai\ ei)^xon a(/panta koina/,
c> 45 kai\ ta\ kth/mata kai\ ta\s u(pa/rceis e)pi/praskon
d> manner p
1> text: kai\ dieme/rizon au)ta\ pa^sin
2> manner: kaqo/ti a)/n tis xrei/an ei)^xen:
 - 6) Breaking bread and prayers: manner p
a> manner-1: 46 kaq' h(me/ran te proskarterou^ntes
o(moqumado\n e)n tw^| i(erw^|,
b> manner-2: klw^nte/s te kat' oi)^kon a)/rton,
c> text: metela/mbanon trofh^s e)n a)gallia/sei kai\
a)felo/thti kardi/as,
d> manner-3: 47 ai)nou^ntes to\n qeo\
e> manner-4: kai\ e)/xontes xa/rin pro\s o(/lon to\n lao/n.
- b) The Lord: o(de\ ku/rrios proseti/qei tou\s sw|zome/nous kaq'
h(me/ran {th ekklhsia}.