

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series: Evangelism

Number: 2

Text: Acts 2:41-47

Date: January 20, 2008 (A.M.)

Pastor/Teacher
Gary L.W. Johnson

THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH AND EVANGELISM

What do we think about when we hear the word *church*? A building? A denomination? An institution? Word association often profoundly influences our view of church. In the minds of a great many Americans, the church is simply another institution and in modern America people are distrustful of institutions.¹ Perhaps the most common concept is this one: “Typically Americans view religious congregations as gatherings of individuals who have chosen to be together, in institutions of their own making and over which they hold control—fostering what sometimes, in the eyes of observers from other countries, appears as ‘churchless Christianity.’ For Americans, religious authority lies in the believer—not in the church, not in the Bible, despite occasional claims of infallibility and inerrancy on the part of some.”² A major theme in the book of Acts is the centrality of evangelism as it relates to the Church. Jesus has promised that He will build His church—not para-church organizations and “ministries” that are seen by boards and the like. This *building* takes place by the agency of the Holy Spirit and through the means of Gospel proclamation. In other words, the Church in the book of Acts was by its very nature an evangelistic Church.

Sometimes you hear some very sincere Christians say, “We need to get back to the early church—if only we could be like the first century Christians!” The implication is that the Apostolic Church was somehow problem-free and if we could just emulate the New Testament Church most of our problems would disappear. This idealistic and romantic notion is quickly dispelled when we turn to the New Testament and discover that most of the epistles were written to address problems very similar to the ones we face today (immorality, scandal, schism, heresy and the list goes on)! This study will focus on four distinctive features that characterized the church in Acts, especially as these relate to evangelism.

I. BOLDNESS

Acts 4:29 records the prayer of the Apostles Peter and John after their release by the Sanhedrin—they had demonstrated remarkable courage in their defense before the Sanhedrin (4:13) and they now pray that the Lord would grant great boldness in preaching. The word trans. *boldness* is PARRĒSIA and it means to speak freely or without restraint. It expresses, among other things, confidence. This word is used repeatedly in the Apostles’ preaching in the book of Acts (9:27, 29; 13:46; 14:3; 19:8; 26:26). Note how in Eph. 6:20 Paul requests prayer so that he may be given boldness to preach Christ.

The early Church had to face frightening and inhibiting circumstances—even physical death. Hostility still confronts us today—and we need this boldness. How do we come by it? I submit that it is to be had in the same way—in reliance upon the Lord of the Church and the power of the Holy Spirit.

II. FELLOWSHIP

This well-worn word has become almost meaningless. Vital fellowship was essential to the early church. The phrase *with one accord* best captures the thought. HOMOTHUMADON is used ten times in Acts and is used to express unanimity. “When the local church lives and works *homothumadon*, it is living and working in harmony with its origin. That is why it is repeatedly stressed by Luke. If he plays down almost all the elements that militated against such unanimity in his picture of the primitive church (Acts 6:1 ff.; 15:37 ff.; cf. 8:1), it was hardly because he wanted to idealize it. It had its tensions and controversies (cf. 1 and 2 Cor., Gal., Epistles of John.). Rather, he wanted to show the essential unanimity of the church, an expression of its nature and therefore a pattern for the later

generations.”³ The word KOINONIA (the most common word for fellowship) also underscores togetherness. 1 John 1:3 reads: *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.* Christian fellowship is rooted in Christ and there is no fellowship that does not have a proper doctrinal understanding of Christ as II John 9, 10 makes abundantly clear. “There is much phony fellowship today,” writes MacArthur, “people getting together on all kinds of pretenses. That is not true Christian fellowship. The basis of body fellowship is not the need of the community, or some common social or religious goal. The basis is indicated by the word *koinonia*, just ‘sharing a partnership, commonness, fellowship, communion.’ Do believers have a common ground? Are they partners in something? Do they have something they may share?”⁴ Harry Reeder has listed twenty New Testament Commands that address this:

1. Love one another (John 13:34; 15:12, 17; Rom. 12:10; 13:8; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:22; 4:8; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 5).
2. Live in peace with one another (Mark 9:50; 1 Thess. 5:13).
3. Esteem one another highly (Rom. 12:10, 16; Eph. 5:21; Phil. 2:3; 1 Peter 5:5).
4. Build up one another (Rom. 14:19; 1 Thess. 5:11, 15).
5. Accept one another (Rom. 12:16; 15:5).
6. Admonish one another (Rom. 15:14).
7. Be courteous to one another (1 Cor. 11:33).
8. Care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25).
9. Serve one another (Gal. 5:13; 1 Peter 4:10).
10. Be patient with one another (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13).
11. Be kind to another (Eph. 4:32).
12. Be tender-hearted toward one another (Eph. 4:32).
13. Forgive one another (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).
14. Sing with one another (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).
15. Comfort one another (1 Thess. 4:18).
16. Encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:24-25).
17. Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16).
18. Pray for one another (James 5:16).
19. Be hospitable to one another (1 Peter 4:9).
20. Greet one another (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14).⁵

III. JOY

There are two Greek words translated *joy*, CHARA refers to a state of joy and gladness. Sometimes this can co-exist with other emotions, such as fear cf. Matt. 28:8 AGALLIASIS is a somewhat stronger word. It means exuberant joy or overjoyed (Luke 1:47). The book of Acts highlights *five* different types of joy.

- A. **The joy at discovering God’s faithfulness** (2:26-28; 13:47, 48). “Nothing gives more delight than the realization that the Scriptures are not just beautiful words, but are guarantees which God will fulfill.”⁶
- B. **The joy of our salvation** (8:39; 16:34). So many of our great hymns are centered on the joy of forgiveness of our sins—such as Wesley’s “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing.”
- C. **The joy over other peoples’ conversion** (11:20-23; 15:3). If the angels in heaven rejoice over the repentance of one sinner (Luke 15:7), then surely God’s people will.
- D. **The joy of fellowship** (2:46; 12:14; 15:31). The company of Christians should be one of consolation and joy.
- E. **The joy that transcends circumstances** (5:41; 13:52). This is a joy which cannot be explained. It is a work of the Holy Spirit.

IV. WITNESS

The things we have looked at so far were all earmarks of the Apostolic Church. But there is more, as J. R. W. Stott

points out, “So far we have considered the study, the fellowship and the worship of the Jerusalem church, for it is to these three things that Luke says the first believers *devoted themselves*. Yet these are aspects of the interior life of the church; they tell us nothing about its compassionate outreach to the world. Tens of thousands of sermons have been preached on Acts 2:42, which well illustrates the danger of isolating a text from its context. On its own, verse 42 presents a very lopsided picture of the church’s life. Verse 47b needs to be added: *And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved*. Those first Jerusalem Christians were not so preoccupied with learning, sharing and worshipping, that they forgot about witnessing. For the Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit who created a missionary church. As Harry Boer expressed it in his challenging book, *Pentecost and Missions*, the Acts ‘is governed by one dominant, overriding and all-controlling motif. This motif is the expansion of the faith through missionary witness in the power of the Spirit. . . . Restlessly the Spirit drives the church to witness, and continually churches rise out of the witness. The church is a missionary church.’”⁷ This is a word that occurs frequently in the book of Acts. The verb form ΜΑΡΤΥΡΕΩ means literally, to give a report. It is used of a witness called to testify. Our English word *martyr* is derived from this Greek word. Christ calls His disciples to be witnesses (1:22) and this is what they were (2:32; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15, 20; 26:16). This is not simply a matter of giving a personal testimony, as helpful as that might be—it must have the historical and doctrinal elements essential to the Gospel. Remember, *testimonies* can be given from a wide variety of religious backgrounds—all claiming to have personally benefited from embracing their particular beliefs—i.e., Mormonism, Buddhism, New Age mysticisms et. al.

CONCLUSION: There is one other trait that characterized the early church, one that is, in many ways, the defining mark of the Apostolic Church—*loyalty*. They were loyal unto death to their Lord and to one another. Loyalty is simply another word for *faithfulness* and faithfulness involves commitment. How loyal are you to the people in your life. How loyal are you to Christ’s people and to His church? The late D. James Kennedy rightly observes, “Loyalty in our time seems rare, as evidenced by the alacrity with which people change friends, jobs, communities, and churches.”⁸

Endnotes

¹ “A 1985 Gallup Poll found that boomers were the least trusting of all age groups toward social and political institutions, even less so than for those younger than themselves. Alienation and estrangement born out of the period continue to express themselves as generalized distrust of government, of major institutions, and of leaders. As Seymour Martin Lipset and William Schneider point out, baby boomers are less polarized in their distrust of both big labor and big business than older generations. Whereas older Americans have tended to distrust one or the other, boomers generally distrust both. Compared with other generations, their distrust of institutions simply runs deeper.” W.C. Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (Harper Collins, 1993), p. 41.

² T.C. Reeves, *The Empty Church: Does Organized Religion Matter Naymore?* (Touchstone, 1996), p. 62.

³ *Dictionary of New Testament Theology III* ed. C. Brown (Zondervan, 1978), p. 909.

⁴ J. MacArthur, Jr. *The Church: The Body of Christ* (Zondervan, 1973), p. 170.

⁵ H. L. Reeder III, *From Embers To A Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (P & R. 2004) p. 182.

⁶ H. K. Moulton, *The Challenge of the Concordance* (Bagster, 1977), p. 226.

⁷ J. R. W. Stott, *The Spirit, The Church and The World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) p. 80

⁸ D. J. Kennedy, *New Every Morning* (Multnomah, 1996), p. 20.