

FAITH
AND
COURAGE
COMMENTARY ON
ACTS

by
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Faith and Courage

Commentary on ACTS

Introduction

The title of this book, “Acts of the Apostles,” was only added in the second century and is not really suitable because it does not cover all the acts that all the apostles did—only Peter and Paul are discussed in any detail. However, it is not solely about these two since we also read something about the ministries of Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy.

The book is written by Luke and makes up the second volume of his writings (the first being the Gospel called Luke). Luke and Acts together, make up about one quarter of the NT, which is more than any other writer. Both books are addressed to the same person—Theophilus (whose name means, “loved of God” or “loving God” or “Friend of God”). Luke says in Acts 1:1 that in his former book (referring to the Gospel of Luke), he spoke of all the things Jesus began to do, and thus by implication, this next book (Acts) is a continuation of the ministry of Christ. Therefore, the best title for the book is probably, “*Christ’s Continuing Work by His Spirit Through Members of the Early Church*.” It is not a comprehensive account of the early church since Luke records only the movements westward and northward from Jerusalem and briefly the movement eastwards into Asia and southwards into Africa (Acts 2:10; 8:27–39; 13:1; 18:24f.). Acts is the only book in the Bible that records the history of the early church, though it does not tell us everything that the Holy Spirit was doing in those days.

Acts was written after A.D. 62 (when Paul was released from prison, cf. Acts 28:30), and before the nineteenth of July A.D. 64 (when Nero began to persecute Christians after the fire of Rome). Acts 28 would not be historically true if the horrific persecutions that the Roman ruler Nero launched against the church were taking place or had already taken place (cf. 28:30, 31).

Luke emphasized the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem, via Antioch to Rome telling us of its spread “to the ends of the earth” (1:8). The conclusion of Acts, after all the hindrances, persecutions, imprisonments and martyrdoms, is that the Gospel cannot be stopped. Christ’s work will continue and success is assured (cf. 1:1,

where Acts is the continuation of the work that Jesus began both to do and to teach, with 28:31, where it continued to flourish).

Luke's desire and purpose was to convince Theophilus that no one is able to stop the victorious march of Christ's Gospel. The book shows how the apostles exerted themselves to fulfill Jesus' mandate (Matt. 28:19), once they had received the necessary power (Acts 1:8; 2:4). In the Gospel of Luke, we are told that Jesus is the Messiah who was predicted in the Old Testament (OT). In Acts, we see how the Gospel advances into all the world and how the Name of Jesus is proclaimed to all the nations in an unstoppable victorious flow. Acts is a book on missions, evangelism and the early church's obedience to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19). We must not think that Luke has just gathered together many different things that happened without any main purpose or flow to his book. The many different incidents that Luke records can only be understood correctly when they are understood in the light of Luke's overall message and one of his main purposes in writing was to show the spread of the Gospel, under the guidance and authority of the apostles, from Jerusalem to all nations. The NT church is a church of unity between Jews and Gentiles and such a change was brought about and confirmed by the Holy Spirit and the authority of the apostolic ministry. The book of Acts shows us how Jesus' promise/command (1:8) was fulfilled and all nations accepted as equal members in Christ's church.

We must not have a romantic picture of the early church as if it was without blemishes, for there were rivalries, hypocrisies, immoralities and heresies. Nevertheless, they had much that we should still try to copy, with perhaps, their great zeal and sacrifice for the work of the Kingdom standing out the most. May we be stirred up by their examples to live our whole lives to the glory of God and for the furtherance of His Kingdom. May we be consumed, despite our own many weaknesses, to fulfill our own special callings under God—doing everything for His glory and continuing the glorious advance of His Kingdom.

Acts 2:24

a). God had handed Christ over to evil men. b). These evil men took Him and they killed Him. c). Then God raised Christ from the dead.

This is the first preaching of the resurrection by the apostles. The resurrection of Christ was also part of the eternal plan of God and predicted by Scripture. God was in complete control and everything was taking place just as He had said: the apostasy of Judas (1:16), the out pouring of the Holy Spirit (2:16–21), and the resurrection of Christ (2:24ff.). God had given Christ up to be killed and now it is God who raises Him from the dead. The reason that Jesus could be raised from the dead, was because the pains of death (or as some translations have it, the agony of death), had been destroyed by Christ. Now the pains of death can refer to both the torments that Christ suffered in death and also the chains or cords that bind you in the tomb (i.e., in the realm of the dead). Christ destroyed both the terror of death and the power of the grave.

We need to realize that the terror of death was more than just the physical suffering that Christ endured in His body. Christ not only suffered agony in the physical qualities of His being (His body), but also suffered torment in the spiritual qualities of His being (His soul). [It is very important to realize that a person's being is *one*—this includes everything that makes up who he is. However, this one being has different qualities. There are the physical qualities that are usually called the “body” and there are the spiritual qualities that are usually called the “soul.” We must not think that people are made up of two “substances” and that we have a spirit living inside a physical body. It is wrong to think that we are two different substances that are somehow joined together. People are a unity, and all of our different qualities make us one being or person. People are not made up of a soul and a body, but rather we are to think of ourselves as one being, having body like qualities and soul like qualities. For an understanding of how this applies to death, see comments on John 11:25, 26].

When Jesus was facing the cross, was He merely thinking about the pain His body was about to suffer? Was it the thought of this physical pain that caused Him so much anguish? When Christ groaned in secret, unseen by any one else, was He merely afraid of the physical pain and suffering He was about to endure? (Luke 22:44). Was

Christ less brave than the many examples of martyrs who confidently and calmly faced death—some singing hymns while the flames slowly burnt them alive? Is Christ's example inferior to those who faced physical death with joy and exaltation? Was Christ pleading with His Father that He might not have to suffer the physical pain on the cross (Luke 22:42)? Was Christ so weak that at the prospect of dying, He needed an angel to appear from Heaven and strengthen Him (Luke 22:43)? Surely it is obvious that there was more going on than just physical death. Christ could not be so terrified of normal death that it forced His sweat to become *like* drops of blood (Luke 22:44) and an angel was required to revive Him. He told His disciples that He was exceedingly sorrowful and troubled (Matt. 26:38; Mark 14:33, 34 and see comments on John 12:27).

Jesus Christ was not going to merely die as God the Son, but as our substitute. He was taking our place and about to pay our debt to God. He was about to take our sins upon Himself and suffer for these sins. He was about to be accounted a sinner and to be punished as sinners should be punished. Our sins began to be laid upon Him in the garden where He was being made a curse. As Isaiah said, "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" and "It pleased the Lord to crush Him and put Him to grief" (Isa. 53:6, 10). This extreme agony that Christ was feeling was not fear of physical death, but the real terror of feeling God's wrath against sin—against Him! Christ never actually became a sinner. Our sin was laid upon Him, but it never became part of Him. Christ was made sin, for our sakes (2 Cor. 5:21).

Christ suffered *all* the punishments that were due to us. He truly experienced the divine wrath and vengeance that God pours out upon sin. He became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13), and therefore, endured the whole of the curse that God's law demands should fall upon sinners. This curse and judgment has reference to body and soul (the whole person). Christ endured all the punishment that we should have received and that includes the torments of hell and the agony of separation from God (Mark 15:34).

However, all of Christ's suffering was completed on the cross. When Jesus said "It is finished" (John 19:30), it was finished! Redemption had been accomplished: there was nothing left to do. Justice had been fully satisfied and there was nothing more to be done in order to pay for our sins—it had been paid in full. Thus Jesus could say to

the thief next to Him, “Today, you shall be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). When Jesus said to God, “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit” (Luke 23:46), that is exactly what happened—the suffering was over, the price had been paid in full. Christ suffered the torments of hell while on earth and never went to the actual place where the lost are kept.

The resurrection of Christ out of the tomb is proof that our penalty has been paid in full (1 Cor. 15:17). We no longer stand under the curse of the law, because the curse of the law has been removed. The law is not a curse and the law has not been removed, but the curse of God that rests upon those who break the law has been removed (Gal. 3:13). It has been removed not because God has changed the standard of the law, but because God has poured out His wrath upon disobedience. He has judged our sinful actions by laying them on Christ and then pouring out His wrath upon Jesus—who had had no sin. He was judged for our sin, but since He had no personal sin, death could not hold Him.

The power of the devil over people is their fear of death (Heb. 2:14, 15). Now death has been destroyed. Death has been swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:54)—by the victory of Christ the curse has been swallowed up. By the cross Christ disarmed the power of Satan and clearly showed His complete victory over him (Col. 2:14, 15). Christ has not only tied up the strong man, but has robbed him (Matt. 12:29). The purpose that Jesus came was to destroy the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8). This He has done by bearing the full wrath of God for those who believe in Him. Christ destroyed the agony of death. He destroyed the power of Satan (we are now told to resist the Devil, James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9). He set us free from the bondage of death, fear and sin—Oh death where is your victory, O grave where is your sting? (1 Cor. 15:55).

How can I be sure that this victory is real? Look at Christ: did He not rise from the grave? The resurrection proves that the power of death is forever broken. If the power of death is broken it means that the power of sin is broken and if the power of sin is broken, it means that the power of the Devil is destroyed. Do you see the glory of the resurrection. Oh, Satan, what a blunder! Oh, powers of darkness, what a mistake! Oh, rulers of Israel, what blindness! Through your wicked murdering of the Son of God you destroyed your own power, setting the captives free.

Christ was innocent of any personal sin. The evil powers murdered the perfect God-man and thus were unable to hold Him, but not only were they unable to hold Him, through His suffering a way of salvation was opened up for God's people. Christ's death appeased God's wrath and satisfied His justice in a way that God can sincerely offer salvation to all people. Those obstacles facing every sinner, arising from their guilt and the law, are ready to be taken out of the way (see comments on John 3:16). When people believe in Christ, the curse and wrath of God hanging over their heads are removed (having been paid in full by Christ), thus, freeing them from the bondage of the Devil (Acts 26:18). They are then released into the liberty of the sons of God. Not only are they set free from fear, but they are sent forth into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim this liberty to all captives (Luke 4:18, 19; Matt. 28:18, 19).

Not only has Satan's power been destroyed, but those who go forth in the Name of the Lord have God's full backing and blessing in order to fulfill their task of discipling the nations (they are heirs to the throne of God and receive the backing of heirs, Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7). With such backing from God, the gates of hell cannot prevent them from fulfilling their mission (Matt. 16:18)—the defeated powers of darkness will not be able to hold out against the advancing church. The forces of evil couldn't hold Christ; they cannot regain the power they lost at Calvary; they will never repair the devastation Christ caused them; and they will never be able to hold back Christ's empowered, ever increasing witnesses (see comments on John 12:31).

Acts 2:25–31

Peter says, I am not making this up and it is neither impossible nor unheard of that someone should rise from the dead, for it was prophesied in the Scriptures. Peter's authority for saying this was not himself, but, once again, the Word of God (as in 2:16). This time he quotes Psalms 16:8–11. Peter says it is obvious that David was not talking about himself in these verses, since David is still in his grave. Rather, David was speaking prophetically about Christ's resurrection. Peter explains that David, with prophetic insight, clearly saw the resurrection of Christ. If the Messiah was going to be resurrected then it meant that the Messiah was going to have to die first. Paul explains the meaning of these verses in the same way (Acts 13:35–37). The term, "You will not leave my soul in Hades" is

to be understood to mean that “You will not leave me among the dead.” Some translations say you will not leave me in the grave. David’s hope was for a descendent to sit upon his throne *forever*—which could only refer to the Messiah. David, aware of this promise from God, saw it pointing to the Messianic Kingdom. The authority and extent of the Messiah’s Kingdom in David’s understanding can be seen in Psalm 2 and Psalm 22—a comprehensive and universal reign.

Acts 2:32

Peter has quoted from the Psalms (Ps. 16) explaining that David was not talking about himself, but about one who was still to come—the Messiah. This was a prophecy of the Messiah’s resurrection that had now been fulfilled in Christ. The one whom David talked about, has been raised from the dead. Peter says, this Jesus whom you all knew (2:22), He has been raised from the dead, for He is the Messiah. The Man whom you crucified, has been raised by God. Peter adds that they were all witnesses—there were many people who had seen Jesus after He rose from the dead: over 500 believers in all (1 Cor. 15:6). The whole city of Jerusalem knew of Christ’s death (Luke 24:18; Acts 2:23) and many more besides (cf. Acts 10:36, 37). The fact that Jesus was no longer in His tomb was also very common knowledge (Matt. 28:11–15). Peter’s listeners knew about Jesus’ death. They also knew that He had been executed for being the King of the Jews (John 19:19–22) and they knew that this Jesus was no longer in His grave. Peter had already said that the works that Jesus had done were clear proof that He was the Messiah (Acts 2:22). David’s prophecy was proof that the Messiah would in fact die, and also rise from the dead. There were more than 500 people who personally saw Christ after He rose from the dead—which easily refuted the testimony of a few guards who had been bribed (Matt. 28:12, 13) to lie about what they knew to be true (Matt. 28:3, 4).

Acts 2:33

Peter goes on to explain the whereabouts of this Jesus now. The reason no one else is able to see Him is because He has been taken to heaven. He has not only been taken to heaven, but God has given Him the place of highest honour and power. Christ’s ascension resulted in Him receiving power and authority over all things both

in heaven and in earth. The prophet Daniel saw all of this, at least 560 years before it happened (Dan. 7:13, 14). What Daniel saw was the Messiah going up to (not coming down from) the Ancient of Days (that is God). This refers to the ascension of Christ and not His Second Coming. The clouds of heaven, refer to the glory of the Lord (Ex. 40:34, 35) and speak of Deity. That this cloud in Daniel was the same cloud that was seen by the disciples at Christ's ascension (Acts 1:9) is a possibility. God's glory cloud brings revelation (Ex. 19:9; 33:9; Matt. 17:5) or judgment (Isa. 19:1). What Daniel saw was the Messiah presented to God in order to receive His prize. Psalm 2:8 tells us what the Messiah would ask for, and here we see Him receiving that which is rightfully His (Dan. 7:14).

After Christ's comprehensive victory on the cross where the powers of the enemy were defeated, the Father granted Christ all authority in heaven and on earth. This prophecy of Daniel refers to Christ's ascension and was fulfilled when Christ ascended. What Daniel said the Messiah would receive, is exactly that which Christ said He had received (Matt. 28:18)—the similarity cannot be denied between these two verses. Jesus said all authority in heaven and earth was now His and this included His authority over all the nations who were to be brought into obedience to Him and to live by every Word from His mouth (Matt. 28:19). What Daniel said the Messiah was to receive, He has received, and this is not only according to Matthew 28:18, but is also seen in 1 Peter 3:22 and Ephesians 1:20–22.

Now to get back to Acts 2:33: The right hand of the throne of God is the place of universal rule and authority. Christ made Himself nothing by becoming a man (Phil. 2:7), and endured complete humiliation on the cross and in the grave (Phil. 2:8), but now He is crowned with glory and honour (Heb. 2:9). Just as when the victorious warrior returned from battle and gave gifts to his friends and subjects (1 Sam. 30:26), so too we see Christ giving gifts to His subjects (Isa. 53:12; Eph. 4:7–12). Peter says, do you want proof that Christ has all authority, do you want proof that He has already received that position of complete Lord over heaven and earth (Dan. 7:14; Matt. 28:18ff.; Eph. 1:20–22; 1 Pet. 3:22)? Then this, which you are witnessing, is proof! This manifestation of the Holy Spirit and incredible gift from Christ is a direct result of His absolute victory over the forces of darkness and of His exaltation to the position of supreme power. The people had asked in Acts 2:12,

“Whatever does this mean?” Peter has now explained its meaning. We could not have these gifts if the victory had not been secured. Christ is the King and has been given all power.

We couldn’t have had such gifts if Christ had not been glorified (John 7:39). The victory has not only been completed, but also secured and Christ has been glorified, therefore, we have been empowered to disciple whole people groups and every part of their culture and life—not only individuals, but whole cultures/nations (Matt. 28:19). *This* (Pentecost) is proof of *that* (Christ’s supreme authority now). What a terrifying task Matt. 28:19 would have been if Christ had not also provided the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work that He had given the church to do.

Those who reduce the discipling of the nations to merely discipling individuals within nations are in rebellion to the Lord’s clear revelation. Just as Israel rebelled against God and refused to conquer the Land of Canaan because they found the task too terrifying, so too it is rebellion today to say, “No Lord, the task you have given us in Matthew 28:19 is impossible.” God had promised to provide the power and the victory for the task He had given to the new nation of Israel (Ex. 23:20, 23), however, Israel rebelled against God’s commands (Num. 14:1–4; Deut. 1:21, 26, 28–33) and in rebelling against these commands denied His protection and His power. They denied His sovereign control and thus rejected the idea that He was able to manifest His purposes and victory on the earth. They believed that He was God in heaven, but on earth it was a different story—the giants were just too big for God (so Israel thought). Their failure and rebellion arose from not trusting God’s Word and not living by faith in His promises. For most of these people, the situation surrounding them was just too much for God to handle. The world was a hopeless mess, God could do nothing, so they wanted to just get out of there. They ignored the fact that they were called by God for a purpose—God’s purpose and Kingdom. God wanted to work through their faithful obedience to His Words. They reduced God’s power and purposes to the limits of their own power and abilities—what they couldn’t do, God couldn’t do.

When we reduce the extent of our responsibilities found in Matthew 28:19, we not only deny the victory of Christ, but also deny His power and turn His glorification into some small worthless cel-

exaltation in heaven. A church with these views, rejects its calling, rebels against the command of God and ends up living for itself (its own comfort, plans and security, rather than for Christ's Kingdom).

Acts 2:34, 35

Peter once again goes to Scripture in order to support what he is teaching. He quotes David again, but this time from Psalms 110. David not only prophesied about Christ's resurrection (Acts 2:31), but also about His exaltation (2:34). This cannot be referring to David, for God is speaking to someone greater than David (Matt. 22:42–46), and David did not rise from the dead and ascend into heaven.

Long ago, God had ordained that Christ should be raised to the highest place of honour. The significant thing is what God says to David's Lord—"Sit at my right hand." Hebrews 1:13 tells us that God has only ever said this to Jesus, who in His human nature has now been exalted and rules with supreme power. When a ruler conquered another ruler he would place his foot upon the defeated ruler's neck to show his victory (cf. Josh. 10:24, 25). Peter says the words of Psalm 110 find their fulfilment in the exaltation of Christ.

Christ will remain seated at the right hand of God, until all His enemies are completely subdued. He is not going to leave that position and come back in order to subdue all of His enemies. Christ's reign and power shall flow from this position (seated in heaven at God's right hand), until the last enemy is destroyed. Christ is ruling now and His sovereign power will continue to bring all things into subjection to Himself. The power of God, working through the Son, is accomplishing this work. The glorious privilege, is that Christ has made us co-workers in this plan. It is only through the power of God and through the authority that Christ earned and received that God's enemies are destroyed, however, in God's mysterious providence, we have a part to play. Whatever we do is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) and flows out of Christ's authority and position in heaven. When Christ comes the next time, history will end (1 Cor. 15:23, 24): for He must reign *until* all His enemies are put under His feet (verse 25)—this means He must reign from His seat at the right hand of God. Christ stays at the right hand of God, reigning over all things and bringing all His enemies into subjection and placing them under His feet until the last

enemy is destroyed or brought to nothing—this last enemy is death (verse 26).

Acts 2:36

Peter says, “House of Israel, there is nowhere to run to. There is no escaping from the evidence and there is absolutely no getting away from the evidence that has been laid before your eyes. Assuredly therefore, let it be known”—there is no room for disputing or arguing and there is nothing left to say. The only possible conclusion is that Jesus is the Messiah. This Jesus whom they had despised and murdered is not only their sovereign King, but He has been raised from the dead and now has all power in heaven and on earth. This realization brings terror to the hearts of those listening to Peter. The one they fought against, is their Lord! The one they crucified is not only their Messiah, but also their God—Peter here makes Christ equal with God. The last word in Peter’s sermon in the Greek is the word “crucified”—that is the thought that is left ringing in the ears of the audience. Peter says, “God has made Him both Lord and Christ; this Jesus whom you *crucified!*” Jesus had often told His disciples, not to say who He was until after His resurrection (Matt. 16:20; 17:9). Now that He had been raised from the dead, ascended to the place of absolute authority and power and had given His followers the gift of the Holy Spirit—well now His name was to be proclaimed from the house tops. Everyone was to be told that He was both Lord and Christ and everyone, everywhere, was to repent and believe in His Name (Acts 17:30).

Acts 2:37

What would have caused the most trouble to Christ’s disciples with respect to the Great Commission? If the world rejected Christ, how would it listen to them? How could they be expected to disciple *all* the nations, when Christ’s very own people had not only rejected His teachings, but had murdered Him? Jesus had told them to wait for the Holy Spirit before they set out to fulfill their task, for it was only with the Spirit is power and enabling that they could accomplish this massive calling.

Jesus had told His disciples that when the Holy Spirit came He would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). The specific sin that people are convicted of is that they do not believe in Jesus (verse 9). The conviction of righteousness is

related to Christ's ascension (verse 10) and all that that means (see Acts 2:33 above).

Peter's speech was very well argued and left his hearers with nowhere to hide. However, good speeches, in and of themselves, can do nothing to change people's hearts. The Holy Spirit, who was present in super abundance, was doing His work on the crowd (John 16:8) and therefore, these people felt crushed and their hearts were deeply convicted about their sin. The conviction was so intense it felt as if a spear had been pushed right through them (they were so troubled and disturbed about what Peter had said that it was like experiencing great pain). The Holy Spirit had opened their eyes to see that they had murdered their Messiah, and King and God. Their behavior had been nothing but high treason against the Holy One of Heaven. The realization of their sin and guilt and the size of the crime that they had committed, left them terrified and helpless. They did not know how they could get out of this horrible situation that they had put themselves in.

The Word of God together with the working of the Holy Spirit had done its job (Heb. 4:12). By the question they ask the disciples, we see an acknowledgement of their guilt, and a recognition of their helpless situation, thus they cast themselves on the mercy of God. They did not flee from the conviction of the Holy Spirit as Judas had done (Matt. 27:3–5), but rather fled to God's messengers and asked for God's answer to their situation. Sorrow must lead to repentance, not self-pity (2 Cor. 7:9, 10).

Acts 2:38

Was Peter a better preacher than Jesus had been? Did Peter say something different to Jesus? Could these people understand Peter better than they could have understood Christ? We must say no to all of these questions. It is the Holy Spirit who brings people to salvation by working in their hearts with the Word that is preached (1 Cor. 1:21). Salvation is God's work. But, you might say, did not these people ask Peter what *they* must do, and did not Peter say *you* must repent? Yes, this is true, however, the Scriptures show us that there are a number of different steps involved when a person is redeemed (saved).

In Romans 8:30 we see that those whom God has predestined unto salvation, are first called, then justified, and then glorified. This is

still not the whole detailed picture, but only a broad summary of the actual steps in our redemption. It must be pointed out that this “call” spoken of in Romans 8:30 is not the same as the general call found in Matthew 22:14, where many are called, but few are chosen. The “calling” in Romans 8:30 is a specific calling by which God’s predestined plan is worked out in the lives of His elect. It is this same calling that calls us into fellowship with God’s Son (1 Cor. 1:9) and by which we are called to be saints (Rom. 1:6,7; Eph. 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:9). For those who are saved, their calling is an outworking of the eternal purposes of God. When God’s eternal purpose of redemption is *applied* to someone’s life, the call of God is the first thing that takes place (in the eternal plan of God, His counsel and predestination obviously come before that point in time when people are actually called, Eph. 1:5, 11; Rom. 8:28, 29; 2 Thes. 2:13).

The fact that those whom God calls, *are* justified (Rom. 8:30), means that God supplies that which is necessary in order to accomplish His purposes. Jesus said people only come to Him if God draws them (John 6:44, 65). The reason we cannot come to Christ on our own accord is because we are dead in our sins (Eph. 2:1, 5) and in bondage to the principles of Satan’s kingdom (Col. 1:13, see *Faith and Reason*, chapters 3 and 4). Therefore, when God calls those who hate Him (Rom. 8:7; Col. 1:21), He also changes their hearts so that they are able to believe and respond to Him. We know from Romans 1:18–21 that God’s truth is clearly seen by the unbeliever and yet he stubbornly refuses to bow to God. That is why God’s answer for man’s problem is to give us a new heart and a new spirit (Ezk. 36:25, 26; cf. Acts 3:26). Thus, when people are born again, it is due to God’s will (John 1:13). Jeremiah tells us that when God gives His people a new heart *then* they will turn to Him with their whole heart (24:7). God has to first make us alive and only then are we able to believe. God first calls us and then quickens us (i.e., makes us alive or regenerates us) which enables us to exercise the gift of faith (Eph. 2:8) and believe in Christ.

Faith and repentance go hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other (faith means to believe in God’s mercy found in Christ, and repentance means to turn from sin). When we have faith in Christ it is in order to be saved from our sins, thus we turn from our sins to Christ (faith and repentance). When we turn from our sins it is because we are placing our faith in God’s mercy (repentance and faith). Despite the fact that both faith and repen-

tance are gifts from God (Eph. 2:8; 2 Tim. 2:25), we still have to exercise them. Faith and repentance are things we have to do and God holds us accountable for not believing and not repenting (John 5:45–47; 11:26; Luke 13:3; Rev. 2:22). However, it must never be forgotten, that in order for us to exercise our faith and repent, God has to first make us alive from the dead. Our wills need to act, but it is only by God's grace that they are able to act in the right way.

The Holy Spirit used Peter's sermon to pierce the hearts of those in the crowd and it was not wrong for them to ask what they should do. There was something that they had to do—repent. Peter says when they turn from their rebellion against God and live by His Words, believing in the completed work of Christ, only then will they be justified (that is, moved from under the wrath of God and placed under His favour). We must accept the clear teaching of Scripture on this whole process that leads to justification, bowing to the sovereignty of God and to His wisdom (see *Faith and Reason*, chapter 6). This process of salvation is in this order: call, regeneration, faith and repentance, justification.

Peter tells them to repent and be baptized. Baptism has two messages: the first and most important one is a message from God to us and then of less importance it is our message telling others that we serve Christ.

Firstly: baptism is God confirming the promise of salvation to us. God has said in His Word that if we believe in Him we will be saved and this is a promise that cannot be moved. However, due to our weakness and blindness, God saw that it was necessary for us to have this sign of baptism in order to strengthen us. Thus in His mercy, God not only gives us a promise in His Word that is perfectly trustworthy, but then adds a sign to confirm this promise He has already given. Baptism is effective when you have faith in the power of Christ to cleanse you from guilt and sin. When we believe in that which baptism signifies (the cleansing power of the blood of Christ), our faith is strengthened. Our troubled hearts and consciences need this double assurance. Baptism brings assurance that our sins are forgiven—it is a seal and confirmation of God's promise to forgive sins and break the power of sin. The value of baptism is only found when we, by faith, take hold of that which it promises (see comments on Acts 22:16). We need to raise our eyes above the outward form and focus on the mysteries it speaks about—the

cleansing from sin and freedom from the death of the flesh. Baptism speaks of God removing the guilt of sin and breaking the power of sin over us.

Secondly: baptism is also a testimony of our relationship with Christ. It tells others whose disciples we are—we are Christ's disciples and follow His teachings. Thus to be baptized in the name of Jesus, means to submit to His authority, to live by all that He commanded and taught, to rely upon His merit and to serve only Him (see comments on Acts 16:15).

Peter tells the crowd that if they have faith in Christ they can be assured that they are both forgiven and set free from the bondage of sin. The only remedy for their pierced hearts was to cast themselves upon the mercy of God. Baptism is the seal of God whereby He would confirm to these crushed hearts that their wickedness and sin against Christ was no longer hanging over their heads (2 Cor. 5:19). Baptism is not necessary for salvation, however it is necessary for the Christian life of submission and obedience to every Word of God.

Peter says, "And you will receive the gift (singular) of the Holy Spirit." This does not mean that you have to be baptized with water before you can receive the gift of the Spirit. This is the receiving of the Holy Spirit Himself—the receiving of His indwelling power, which takes place at conversion. It is the gift of grace and salvation that enters the hearts of those who are saved.

The glory of God descended on the church at Pentecost, as it had descended on the tabernacle and temple in the OT (Ex. 40:34; 2 Chron. 5:13, 14), showing where God dwelt. The church is now God's holy place—His dwelling place on earth. When we receive Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit and it is impossible to receive Christ and not to receive the Holy Spirit. We only know that Christ lives in us by the Spirit that He gives to us (1 John 3:24). In John 14:16–18; Romans 8:9, 10, 14, 16; and 2 Timothy 1:14, we see that the work of Christ and that of the Holy Spirit are inseparable, which means if we do not have the Spirit then we do not have Christ—we are not saved. If we are saved it is because Christ lives in us (John 6:56; 14:23; 15:4–7) and He lives in us by His Spirit (John 7:39; 16:7; 2 Cor. 3:14, 16, 17). We become members of Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:12) by being baptized into it by the Holy Spirit (verse 13). To receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, means to receive the

indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is received with the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Titus 3:5; 1 Cor.6:11,19; Eph.1:13,14).

Peter said to the crowd, that if they repented and were baptized, then they *would* receive the gift of the Spirit; this is because if they repented they would be saved—if you are saved you receive the Spirit. There is no evidence to show that these converts spoke in tongues or that the apostles laid their hands on them in order to receive the Spirit. Therefore, we assume that speaking in tongues and laying on of hands are not requirements for receiving the Spirit or showing that one has received the Spirit. The Scriptures tell us that it is the fruit of the Spirit that provides us with proof that we have the Spirit—that is have Christ (see, Matt. 7:18; 12:33–37; Gal. 5:22–25).

Acts 2:39

Promise: refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit which Joel prophesied would be given to the New Covenant church (2:16). Peter holds out the promise of the Holy Spirit as the motivating incentive for repentance and baptism—when you repent this amazing gift will be yours. The promised gift is for all those whom God will call, since all whom God calls are brought into fellowship with Christ through faith. It is God’s *specific call* that has with it the power to achieve its goals and is to be distinguished from His general call (see 2:38 above). Peter says the Holy Spirit is for all who are called.

The church received this promise on the day of Pentecost and Peter says to the crowd, that this out-pouring of the Holy Spirit is for everyone (who believes). Such a gift was not just for the apostles and Jesus’ close disciples, but was meant for all those who would believe in His name—even those who had murdered Christ could receive the Spirit. As we saw in 2:17, 18, the Spirit was for all classes of people—sons, daughters, servants and now Peter clearly includes Gentiles (“to all who are afar off,” cf. Eph. 2:11, 13, 17). God had promised through Isaiah, saying, “I will pour My Spirit on your descendants and My blessing on your offspring” (Isa. 44:3, see too 59:21).

We see the glory of the New Covenant where God gives the Spirit to all of His chosen (those who believe because they have been called). There is no longer a small group who receive a special position in

God's Kingdom and are able to taste of the deep things of God. The fullness of God's revelation is now available to everyone who believes (who calls on the name of the Lord, Acts 2:21).

Acts 2:40

With many other words Peter exhorted the crowd: now whether this means he continued after this speech to tell them many other things, or whether it means the speech we have in Acts is merely a summary of what Peter actually said, we cannot be sure. All we do know for sure is that we do not have a record of everything Peter said. He said many things in his attempt to win these people. Peter's example of being a witness for Christ includes trying to persuade people with arguments, solemn exhortations and commands. He kept on urging them to be saved from their perverse generation (1 Pet. 3:15). Peter fully instructed them as to what they should believe and what they should do. He exhorted them to be separated from their present generation who were on a path to utter and eternal destruction—rather, he was offering a way to be saved from the doom awaiting that generation.

Wicked generation: referred to the whole of the unbelieving nation of the Jews with the corrupt controlling religious rulers at the top (Sanhedrin). The power, influence and control that these religious leaders had over the people was immense. We can see the control and influence that they were able to exert when Jesus was condemned. Shortly before He was condemned to die, a great multitude praised Him as the Messiah and the whole city of Jerusalem was moved (Matt. 21:8–11), yet the chief priests got the multitude at Jesus' trial to call for His death and ask for the release of a murderer (Mark 15:11–15; Matt. 27:20, 24, 25).

We can see the wickedness and perverseness of these religious leaders by Jesus' own words of condemnation pronounced upon them (Matt. 23). Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees that after they have finished teaching someone they turn that person into twice as much a son of hell as themselves (Matt. 23:15). They were wicked, wicked people with perverted ideas, but worse still, they had tremendous influence, power and control over the lives of the people and therefore the people were also a perverse generation. The whole of Jewish life was influenced by their religion and it was a serious thing to be out of favor with the religious authorities (John 9:20–23).

John the Baptist came preaching and calling on people to repent, for the judgment of God was about to fall upon that generation (Matt. 3:10, 12). He also condemned the religious leaders (Matt. 3:7) and exhorted the whole nation to repent. Jesus pointed out the intense struggle and conflict that was involved when one repented and believed in Him, because it was no small thing to turn your back on that perverse generation and follow Christ. He says in Matthew 11:12, “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force.” This is *not* talking about guns and physical force, but is presenting a picture of what is entailed in entering the Kingdom of heaven. You have to get out of the clutches of the perverse generation—out of their control, influence and manipulation. This is not easy, but rather is such an intense struggle that it can be called *violent* (cf. Matt. 10:21, 34). There has to be earnest, intense determination with a total casting off of the old life and all of its influences. Zeal and determination are characteristics of those who are born again and are made new creatures in Christ. These characteristics of zeal and determination to receive all that God has promised are clearly seen in Jacob. Jacob knew what was his and struggled to obtain the fullness of what God had promised to bless him with (Gen. 32:24–30)—he wrestled with God the whole night and said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me” (verse 26).

The world is at enmity with God and seeks to exist in complete contradiction to everything God says and does (see *Faith and Reason*, chapters 3 and 4). That is why there is such a radical difference between the kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of light—they are exact opposites. Peter says, be saved from this perversity! God had said the same through Isaiah, “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:17; Isa. 52:11).

Often we do not realize the complete change that is required when we come into God’s Kingdom. We are told that friendship with the world is enmity with God. Whoever therefore wants to be a friend with the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:4, see too Rom. 8:7; Col. 1:21). What exists in this world are two whole systems of thinking and living—one is in obedience to God and the other is in rebellion to Him (these are the only two options the Bible recognises). God is a jealous God who demands absolute obedience. We either humbly submit to His every Word or we proudly

rebel against Him and follow some other word, living by some other standard.

Our own generation and times are as perverse and as rebellious as that one Peter was talking about. The basic similarity between the two is their refusal to humble themselves under the hand of God and live their lives by every Word that proceeds from His mouth (Matt. 4:4). This is where we have to be aware of the “violence” required to enter the Kingdom in our day (Matt. 11:12). Our minds are to be renewed by the Word of God (Rom. 12:2)—knowing what He has said and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

Everything in the world opposes the way God would have us to live. The whole mindset is anti-God: from education to media outlets—television, cable, satellite, radio, newspapers, books, magazines, and government publications—everything. Even Christians and churches are often in opposition to God, because they fail to bring *every* thought, belief and action into submission to Christ. Everything we do and think, at every moment, is to be brought into obedience to Jesus. This is what Revelation 13:16 is talking about: those who have the beast’s mark on their forehead and hand are those people whose actions and thinking are completely controlled by the beast’s ways, whereas, God requires us to be totally controlled by His Word in all of our thinking and actions (Deut. 6:4–9). Many Christians in our day continue to live in rebellion against God’s comprehensive instructions for all of life. They think that Revelation 13:16 is still way off in the future and they say, we definitely will not compromise when that day arrives and the beast demands that we live by his commands. However, in not living by every Word from the mouth of God, they are already living by another standard and the mark of the beast is written over their whole body and life.

We also need to heed Peter’s words and be saved from our perverse generation. Firstly, by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and then secondly, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we need to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, bringing every thought into line with Christ and living by every Word that proceeds from God’s mouth (Phil. 2:12; 2 Cor. 10:5; Matt. 4:4). If we do not do this we will never know what it is to live in the Kingdom of God as we ought to.

Acts 2:41

3,000 of the crowd received Peter's words and were baptized. The word *baptized* incorporates the whole salvation process of believing, being baptized, and receiving the Holy Spirit. Many, however, hardened their hearts even more and walked away from the words of life. These same words from Peter led either to blessing or increased condemnation—there can never be a neutral response to the Gospel. The Word of God always demands submissive obedience and we have to respond one way or another. The only two possibilities are obedience or rebellion! Prior to Pentecost, the number of believers in Jerusalem was about 120. It is probably safe to say that more people came to true faith in Christ after Peter's first sermon than had believed throughout the whole ministry of Jesus. This growth of the early church continued at a remarkable rate so that a conservative estimate says there were about 20,000 Christians in Jerusalem at the time of the persecutions in Acts 8:1. For this remarkable growth of the church in Jerusalem see Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7.

Jesus had said that His disciples would do greater works than He because He was going to the Father (John 14:12–18). For the significance of what it meant for Him to go to the Father see Acts 2:33. Thus the power of the Holy Spirit had been given to the church by Christ so that the great commission could be fulfilled (John 16:7; Matt. 28:19) and here we see the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit working through the preaching of the apostle. Our hope for success must rest in the power of the Holy Spirit who works mightily in people's hearts when the Word of God is preached simply and purely. We do not need fancy programs, buildings and shows in order to fulfill the great commission. What we need is pure doctrine and the power of the Spirit, so that people's faith does not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:5). Even when people come to faith in Christ through our witnessing, we must never forget that it has nothing to do with us; primarily it is God's work, but there have also been others before us who have will not in this work (John 4:37, 38; 1 Cor. 3:5–9).

Baptism does not need to follow extensive instruction and examinations, however, the person being baptized needs an understanding of a basic statement of faith (enough to make an acceptable profession of faith) and be able to explain the Biblical promises sig-

nified in baptism. As we have seen already, baptism is primarily God's message to the sinner of the cleansing and acceptance available through faith in Christ (2:38 above). Baptism is not primarily the sinner's message of repentance to God and therefore he does not need extensive classes and instruction before he can be baptized. This group of 3,000 was sufficiently instructed in only one long lecture (the fact that they were devout Jews might account a little for the fact that they needed only one lecture), and the reason being, baptism is for the benefit of the sinner, so that he might have full assurance of forgiveness. Thus, for a person to know that he is a sinner in need of a savior, and for him to be able to explain the basic beliefs of the Christian religion and the promises signified by baptism, is all we should require before baptizing him. This confirmation of assurance is vital for the believer's heart, for the *Holy Spirit* increases the faith of the one who is baptized by enabling them to understand God's promises signified in baptism. They receive grace, are built up, strengthened and encouraged through receiving this sign of the cleansing power of Christ who alone can take away sin. We need to be aware that there is a blessing received in baptism that is not received in the preached Word alone. 3,000 souls were baptized and added to the church that day.

Acts 2:42

The new converts were persevering in the apostle's teaching. This means more than merely personal attendance, but includes sticking close to the side of something or someone. Now what they were persevering in was not a certain set of beliefs. The apostles' teaching or doctrine does not refer to the actual truth that was taught, but to the new converts' practice of diligently attending the lectures (teachings), which the apostles were giving. They persevered by faithfully attending all the teachings—as a result they received a solid Biblical understanding that was true to apostolic truth. The emphasis is that the converts were diligently coming to the lectures. They hungered to be instructed in the pure Word of God.

The new converts' perseverance was not just with attending the lectures, but also with respect to communion (fellowship), breaking of bread and common prayer. Their fellowship was with the apostles *and* with one another—reflecting a very close intimacy one with another. It obviously also referred to their new and deep fellowship with the Lord (1 John 1:3; 2 Cor.13:14). A true oneness was mani-

fested by them in all that they did; loving others as themselves (Matt.7:12; 22:39; Gal. 5:14). This was an ability to give and receive, and to seek someone else's benefit before their own. The emphasis here is upon their singleness of heart, mind and purpose.

The "breaking of bread" in this verse, does not refer to the Lord's Supper, but continues to explain the extent of this intimate oneness. In Luke's Gospel, we do not see that the Lord institutes the Supper as something that was to be continued (I am not saying that it is impossible that Jesus could have done this, but rather that we have no record that this was done). This is important in the sense that Luke wrote both his books to Theophilus (Acts 1:1) and in neither book is Theophilus told that the Supper had become a permanent aspect of the life of the church. Thus, "breaking the bread" in verse 42 would not automatically bring to his mind the Lord's Supper as we understand it today. I think commentators have read the Lord's Supper into this verse. If Theophilus did wonder what the term "breaking of bread" meant in verse 42, then surely verse 46 would have lead him to conclude that this term referred to normal meals? Moreover, if Theophilus, wanting to understand this term "breaking bread," turned to Luke 24:30, 35 he would have concluded that Luke used the term to refer to a normal meal, for there is no way that the Lord was about to celebrate the Lord's Supper with the disciples from Emmaus (common meals had played an important part in Christ's ministry before His crucifixion, cf. Matt. 9:10, 11; 11:19; Mark 2:15; Luke 15:1, 2). In Acts 20:7, 11 there is nothing to force him to think that it is talking about anything other than a Sunday evening meal, which was delayed by a long lecture. And Acts 27:35 is definitely *not* a celebration of the Lord's Supper! This was among a group of unbelievers and verse 36 shows they were in need of food.

It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that Luke would have made a clear distinction between these different uses of "breaking bread" (if they really were different) and also given some kind of explanation to Theophilus if he was talking about this very important and divinely instituted sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Acts 2:42. However, we find no such thing and it is only by importing our own ideas into these verses that we can see the Lord's Supper there.

I do not see this verse (42) as outlining a worship service. The whole section (42–47) is a record of the infant church and not a

pattern of conduct we ought to try to implement. What we need to imitate is the zeal, devotion, commitment to sound teaching, concern for one another, and singleness of purpose that the infant church had. We should desire to have hearts like them, rather than seek to imitate their actions in exactly the same way.

There were times of prayer in the temple, however, the prayer here (42) is better understood as flowing out of the small individual gatherings of believers. This was not some big, church organized, prayer meeting, but was part of their lives. Prayer was a natural outflow of their fellowship and being together in each other's houses. Prayer is a crucial and vital aspect of the life of the church, however, it is necessary to explain the different ways we are to understand the word *church*.

The word church can be used in the sense of the "institution" (the place where believers come to hear the Word preached, the place where the body gathers for worship and instruction), or it can be used to refer to the whole body of believers who are the church. Thus, on Monday morning the church goes out into all areas of life and should spread the fragrance of Christ everywhere. Thus the word church is used in a specific (the institution) and a general (all believers) sense and unless we make this distinction then we will become confused and misled. We will expect the institution to do the work that the whole body should be doing. The institution is to equip the body to do the work God has given the church to do. The problem is we want the institution to do everything and think that it alone is called to do the work of Christ's church. God's rule and Kingdom are over all things and it is the church (which means the whole body of believers) that is to fulfill the work of the ministry—going forth in the power of the Holy Spirit into all of life and bringing all things into obedience to Christ's Word (2 Cor. 10:5; Luke 24:47, 48; John 20:21).

Many times our understanding of the ministry of the church is limited to what the institutional church does or does not do. Thus, if the institutional church has no prayer meetings or does not organize any fellowship meetings or does not organize any "love feasts" then the body does not do any of these things. What we fail to realize is that the whole body of the church in Acts 2:42ff. was doing the work of the ministry. All these things were coming naturally to them and flowed out of true conversion and good teaching. They

realised that they had a calling under God that entailed more than just going to the institutional church meetings on Sunday and doing a few gardening jobs around the church building. Thus prayer, fellowship and meals were things that naturally flowed out of their new life.

The work of the ministry is far, far, greater than what the institutional church can possibly do on its own. And its responsibility is not to control and oversee every activity done by the whole body of believers. The whole body of believers receive their instruction from those within the institutional church whom God has gifted and given authority for this task, but then the believers are to go out to do the work of the ministry. In our day we limit the ministry of the church to that of the institutional church and all the believers (who make up the whole body of Christ's church) have to fulfill their "ministries" within the narrow confines of the institutional church. This greatly retards the ministry of Christ's church to the whole world.

The institutional church has authority to oversee the preaching and teaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments, for these are the tools that are needed in order to equip the whole body of Christ for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11–16). However, we need to realize that the ministry of the church is to cover the whole of God's Kingdom—and He reigns over all things. Therefore, the church's work is not to be restricted to, or completely controlled and organized by the institutional church. The work of the Kingdom is *not* to be limited to the work of the institutional church, whose task from God is to preserve true doctrine and impart this to all believers, showing them how to rightly divide the Word of truth. The body needs to be thoroughly equipped for the work of the ministry (2 Tim. 3:17) and shown how to live by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. They need to be able to apply God's Word to all of life, earnestly praying for and working toward that day when the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14).

Acts 2:43

The apostle's teaching was authenticated (confirmed) by miracles. Paul's proof of his authority as an apostle was that he had performed miracles (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Heb. 2:1–4). The words of the apostles therefore carried divine authority and these words have

been preserved by God for us in the Bible and thus continue to have divine authority. It is not necessary to have these words confirmed again and again by more and more miracles. They have God's authority and were confirmed by miracles once, which is enough. Our responsibility is to live by these words. We are to love the Lord with our whole being (heart, soul, mind and strength) and we do this by obeying all of Christ's Words (John 14:10; 1 John 2:3–5; 5:2, 3; Rev. 22:14). Thus, we are to be consumed in our seeking to know His will and do it, by His grace. This alone is what should consume us! To seek for miracles is to be side-tracked and taken down a dead-end path that only leads us away from what we should be doing. The purpose for these miracles was to show the authority of the apostles' teaching—who taught us what Christ and the Holy Spirit had taught them (John 14:26; 16:13, 14; Matt. 28:19, 20). We now have this teaching in the Scriptures and it is this teaching that is of vital importance for our ministry in the Kingdom.

Acts 2:44, 45

There are only two classes of people—believers and unbelievers. All those who believed were together. This does not mean that they were all living in one place, for the numbers of believers were just too great. This, as I have mentioned in verse 42 refers to the unity of feeling, purpose and affection one to another that was manifested in the infant church. This led them to hold all things in common and when the need arose someone would sell what they had and meet that need. The question is, should this be our example today?

What we need to imitate is the infant church's heart of generosity and concern for the body. But this does not mean that we must imitate everything that they did. The principles to notice are their desire to meet *real needs*. We too need to be sensitive to the *real* needs around us, however, many think that it refers to every need. This is not so.

First: this meeting the needs of others flowed out of close intimate fellowship. This was not merely giving to complete strangers (cf. Acts 3:6), but to those whose characters and lives were known. There are many people in this world that are just lazy and deceptive. The Scriptures speak strongly about laziness (Prov. 6:6–11; 10:4, 5; 12:24; 13:4; 19:15; 20:4, 13; 21:25, 26; 24:30–34). We are not to think that the NT is a time where laziness is no longer a sin (1 Thes. 4:11, 12; 2 Thes. 3:10–12). Even Jesus' disciples had a wrong under-

standing in this area. They thought that any extra money should be given to the poor—Jesus rebuked them for this (Matt. 26:7–11, see too comments on John 12:8). Our understanding of the needs of the poor are to be seen in the light of all the above verses.

Second: it was not compulsory. Some still had houses (verse 46; cf. 5:4). When someone saw a need and felt they would like to help, they sold something and helped to meet that need. All this help was purely voluntary, i.e., real charity.

Thirdly: this was a unique situation. There were many visitors in Jerusalem who had been converted and in order to be instructed by the apostles, had extended their stay which created real needs (it is quite understandable that such people could have run out of money). But, where else could they have gone in order to be instructed in these early days of the church? Thus they had to remain in Jerusalem. These happenings were totally unexpected and therefore these converts were totally unprepared for an extended stay. It is only in the very early stages of the church (Acts 2 and 4) that this kind of behavior is recorded.

Fourthly: John the Baptist had prophesied about the soon destruction of the nation (Matt. 3:10, 12; cf. Mal. 3:2; 4:1, 3, 6). Jesus had prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 23:35—24:34). Peter had said, “Be saved from this perverse generation” (Acts 2:40). Surely with clear, specific and repeated prophecies about the destruction of the city they were living in, this would not have been ignored by the apostles in their daily instruction of the people. Thus all of these believers were aware of Jerusalem’s soon coming destruction and the fact that when it came, they would have to flee and leave everything behind (Matt. 24:16–18). They would not even be able to take a cloak, never mind fixed property, therefore, it was wise to sell while they could and use this money for a worthy cause.

Fifthly: if this part, of everyone owning nothing, was meant to be copied, why not the rest? What if the whole body of Christ continued, every day in nothing but continual worship and fellowship, with no one doing any work? If we were to copy their example exactly we would end up as the lazy man in Proverbs.

Therefore, we conclude that this is not to be something that we try to copy in our own day. Socialism does not work, because at the

bottom it does not take into account the depravity of man's heart (see further comments on Acts 4:32ff.).

Acts 2:46

This was a unique time in the history of the NT church. What they were doing daily is not a realistic picture of the Christian's responsibilities. As we saw in the previous verse, there are biblical principles behind their actions and these should be part of our lives, however, we are not to copy the details of how these principles were manifested in their situation. The church should not try to have daily meals together, thinking that this will produce revival and true spirituality. The essence here was not the meals but that which caused the meals to happen, namely, being in one accord. This is what we should seek to imitate within our church and relationships. The infant church's oneness of heart manifested itself in daily meals, etc. This is how their oneness was expressed in those unique times and circumstances, but that does not mean it is the only way that oneness of heart is manifested and expressed.

We need to be wise and relevant to our own times and circumstances and see how best to show forth the same spirit seen in Acts 2. The principles are always eternal, however, the specific manifestation of the principle will vary from culture to culture and age to age. For example: having a railing around the roof (Deut. 22:8) has an eternal principle of protecting life, whereas the specific manifestation was relevant to that culture where they did lots of entertaining on their roofs. We will fulfill this principle in different ways in our own day, i.e. putting fences around swimming pools, so that children cannot fall in and drown, manifests the principle of preserving life. Also, putting fences around playgrounds so that the children do not run onto the road, etc. We need to be warned though, that where God *has* given us specific detailed instructions about what we should do, then we are to fulfill these and not to try to manipulate them by saying these are not for our own culture and time: for example, trying to do away with the death penalty for murders. God's Word clearly tells us that murderers should be executed. So too should convicted rapists, homosexuals, kidnappers, etc. (Gen. 9:5, 6; Deut. 22:25; Lev. 20:13; Deut. 24:7).

Thus, there is no sure basis for thinking we are to have meals every day in each other's houses and in the same way we should not hope that the temple will someday be restored so that we might copy the

early church perfectly and go and worship in the temple. The early Christians were in one accord both in their public worship and in their private lives—this is what we ought to learn from them and seek to imitate.

The OT way of worship ended with Christ: the temple, the priesthood, sacrifices, feast days (all the ceremonial laws), came to an end. Thus, the apostles and the early Christians would not have participated in the daily animal sacrifices that were done in the temple and nor would they have looked to the OT priesthood to assist them in anyway. So there was a radical break in some ways, however, in other ways there was a slow transition or change where the old system overlapped the new one. The early Christians still worshipped and prayed in the temple—they still used that facility although it was passing away and would be totally destroyed, never to be restored. One cannot imagine that the Christians went up to the temple to receive instruction from those who were dead in trespasses and sin (the old priesthood). There were some aspects to the old order that they could have participated in without compromising their new faith in Jesus—this was acceptable during this transitional period. They also must have used the facility for their own teachings, worship and prayer (since it was able to accommodate many people at one time, whereas in the houses only small groups could gather). The temple was also a good place to evangelise, since many Jews gathered there every day. Nevertheless, their presence in the temple, was an overlapping of the Old and New orders. There was not a radical break in absolutely every way.

There are important principles to learn through this. Christianity is both revolutionary (see Acts 2:40 above) and not revolutionary and we need wisdom to know which one is required when. At times we see a sudden and sharp break with the past, but at other times we also see a slow moving away from the past. This can be seen in the ministry of John the Baptist who called for a complete and sudden break with the religious order of his day—to repent, believe in and follow the One who was coming, yet he still continued to minister even after Jesus had arrived. There was a period of ministry where they both overlapped, however, the one was increasing and the other was decreasing (John 3:26,30).

We must never compromise the fundamentals of the Christian faith, but there are times when, with wisdom, for the sake of fur-

thering the Kingdom, we should be sensitive to the need for gradual change, being sensitive to deep cultural convictions (cf. Acts 16:3 with Gal. 2:3). There are some circumstances when a complete sharp break with the past will do more harm than good. Maturity is knowing the difference between a fundamental of the Christian faith and something that is indifferent or can be slowly changed without compromising our crucial beliefs (e.g., Acts 18:18; 21:18–25). Sometimes it is obvious that radical over-night breaks are quite impossible (2 Kin. 5:18, 19)—though we must always be careful to make sure we are not contradicting God’s clear Word with respect to salvation! There can never be any compromise in this area—ever!

Breaking bread from house to house: is having normal meals in one another’s homes, showing us the close unity among the believers (see comments on 2:42). The way they ate their meals tells us much about Christianity. They did it in gladness and simplicity of heart. The emphasis in this whole section (verses 42–47) is upon the unity, harmony, sincerity and joy of those in the infant NT church.

The singleness of heart was due to a number of things: They were totally focused on Christ; worshipping Him and doing His will; having one aim, purpose and motive. But at the base of this was an attitude of humility within their own hearts. There was no one trying to manipulate or control anyone else, but rather each esteemed everyone else better than themselves (Rom. 12:10; Phil. 2:3; 1 Pet. 5:5). Nor did they allow their different characters to get in the way and cause unnecessary problems. No one was putting stumbling stones on the path to cause offence and disruption—the surface was smooth and flat and humility has a major part to play in creating this kind of a situation among brethren (Eph. 4:2, 3; Rom. 15:5, 6).

This gladness in eating is a beautiful picture and gives us a proper Biblical understanding of life. Life on this earth is a wonderful gift from God and has been made for us to enjoy. It is not to be seen as something to endure while we wait for heaven. The only way that we can be truly glad in all that we do in this life is if we are in Christ. When God approves of us then we are able to be joyful in the simple things of life (Ecc. 2:24–26; 3:13; 5:18–20; 9:7; Deut. 12:7). We must not only be contented with what we have, but must rejoice in it (Phil. 4:4; 1 Thes. 5:16). Eating and drinking talks of companion-

ship, rejoicing and fullness (satisfaction). There was a time in the OT when God's money (tithe) was to be used to buy whatever you wanted to eat and drink and you were to have a joyous celebration and feast with your family (Deut. 14:26).

God is sovereign over all things. Nothing can happen without His permission. Thus we can rest in Him and pursue our earthly responsibilities, and enjoy our earthly pleasures as coming from His hand—enjoying them for His glory. We are to enjoy the blessings that come from God! Work is a blessing. Food and drink are also blessings. Health and the ability to earn wealth are blessings. Our possessions and our families are to be blessings. Our giftings and callings are a blessing. Our joy is not only to be *in* our hearts, but is to be manifested in the way we walk and live and in everything we do. Many think that they can have joy in their hearts without manifesting this in their walk. In Ecclesiastes 11:9, cheerfulness is not just allowed, but it is commanded and makes up an essential part of what a Christian should be. The difficulties of life, the foolishness of the world and hard and disappointing experiences can vex us and thus we can lose our joy (Ecc. 11:10). If people have taken advantage of us in the past, we must first of all accept it from the hand of God, knowing that all things work together for good to those who love God (Rom. 8:28), second, we must learn from the experience and become wiser, thirdly, we must know that God will deal with all unsettled accounts—perfect justice will be dealt out. Sometimes this is carried out here on earth, but definitely on that final day everything will be made right. Thus we need not worry and be bitter about anything. We are to live unto the Lord with sincerity, being joyful and wise, and we must not let our hearts get vexed by the evil in this world and the sinfulness of people. Justice is God's department (Rom. 12:19), our responsibility is to walk before Him in faithfulness, doing all He has told us—that includes rejoicing. Thus, we must not let the sinful actions of others make us sin (cause us to walk without joy). When David had Uriah murdered (2 Sam. 11 and 12:9), he had sinned against both Uriah and Bathsheba, however, when he confessed to God, he said, "Against You and You only have I sinned" (Ps. 51:4). Therefore, those who sin against us sin against God and God will not leave one sin unpaid for. They will receive God's chastisement which will lead to repentance or they will receive His eternal damnation. "Judgment is Mine," says the Lord, "I will repay!" (Heb. 10:30). As for the pure in heart, they

alone are able to rejoice. The joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10).

The early church had this kind of gladness because they were accepted by God. They were not trying to earn acceptance. They were justified and living by faith and thus, all that they did was approved by God (we are not talking about sinful behavior here). The Christian is not striving for acceptance and approval before God, he is already completely accepted in Christ. Thus our lives should consist of thankfulness and true joy. Even the most basic everyday things, like eating a meal are opportunities to manifest this glorious new position in life—oneness with God through Christ, resulting in deep, sincere, overwhelming joy. Therefore, we are not to strive after some formula or appearance of unity or “joy” (i.e., insisting upon daily meals together), but rather we are to have the real thing—real joy, which is a consequence of true faith in Christ and sound apostolic teaching or understanding of who we are in Christ.

Acts 2:47

Praising God was just a natural expression that flowed from their hearts as a result of this amazing blessing they had been given through Christ. Their whole life was one of praise to God. The next phrase could mean either that they had favor with all the people or that the believers had goodwill towards all the people. Most commentators go with the first option, saying the Christians found favor with all the unbelievers in Jerusalem. There is some merit for the second option though, however, Acts 4:13 adds weight to the first option and we probably should interpret 2:47 in this way. I am, however, unable to make a definite choice between the two options at this time. The Lord daily added saved people to the church. Salvation is the Lord’s work and this wonderful miracle was taking place *daily*. The believers own godly way of life was used by the Lord as a means of drawing people to Himself. The infant church’s unity, love, humility, self-denial, consistent Christian witness, zeal and devotion to the Lord were powerful tools in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Such behavior will draw many people to ask about the reason for the hope that is in you. It will make them open to hear what the church has to say, thus giving opportunity for them to come under the preaching of the Word. When we believe, we are saved and become part of the eternal body of Christ, His church.