

THE EFFECT OF PETER'S SERMON

Acts 2:37-41

On the day of Pentecost Peter finished his great sermon with these memorable words: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." What was their response to his message?

The Holy Spirit used Peter's sermon to pierce their hearts. His hearers were pierced through as with an arrow and made deeply conscious of their terrible guilt. The Holy Spirit wrought this deep conviction in their hearts. Conviction for sin is ever a divine work and always beyond man's power. Conviction for sin precedes concern about salvation, and both are essential to the salvation of a sinner.

Upon hearing Peter's sermon, the Jews were convinced of its truth, convicted of their guilt, and so filled with fear of the wrath of God that they cried out, "Men and Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter commanded them to repent and to be baptized in the name of Christ. To these Jews repentance meant to change their minds about Christ, to admit their guilt in rejecting Him, and to turn in faith to Him. As an outward expression of their inward repentance and faith, they were commanded to be baptized. Having been cleansed from their sins through repentance and faith, symbolically they were to express that cleansing by being baptized. Baptism has no meaning if sins have not already been forgiven. Baptism has no meaning if sins have not already been forgiven. Baptism was intended for believers only. It was never intended to make believers. It was given as a symbol, but it was not vested with a saving virtue.

The word translated "for" in verse 38 is used to express "basis," "ground," or "cause". "For the remission of sins" simply means on account of, or on the basis of, the remission of sins. To illustrate, it was the custom of some of my earliest school teachers to whip their pupils for fighting on the playground. In each case the boys were whipped for fighting, not in order to enable them to fight or to make them fight, but because they had fought already. So, we are baptized, not in order to have our sins forgiven, but because they have been forgiven already on the ground of our repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism never saved a single soul, and was never intended to do so. Only Jesus Christ can save. Because He saved us, when we believed on Him, we gladly submitted to baptism as an act of loving obedience to Christ. Baptism symbolized our experiences as believers in Christ.

"Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." What a Gift! What a Guide! What a Guardian! And to think, He has come to remain.

About three thousand souls were saved and added to the church. They were not added in order to be saved, but because they were saved. Is that why you joined the church? Salvation and baptism are the two prerequisites to church membership.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIRST CHURCH

Acts 2:42-47

I. Steadfastness. Acts 2:42.

"Steadfast" is defined as being "firmly fixed and established; steady; constant; uniform." Those early Christians were not spasmodic. They continued steadfast regardless of conditions and hardships.

1. Steadfast in doctrine.

They were constant in their attendance upon the teachings of the apostles. There was much for them to learn. They did not surrender, nor modify, nor compromise the fundamental things which they were taught. How many in our present day churches are "established" in the faith "once for all delivered unto the saints"?

2. Steadfast in fellowship.

They continued in fellowship with God. Fellowship consists of walking and talking with God as one would with his best earthly friend. What intimacy! Many in our churches today are not enjoying fellowship with God. No wonder there are so many darkened faces and empty lives among church members today. They are out of fellowship with God. Those early Christians also enjoyed fellowship with one another. They were bound together by unbreakable ties. They felt the need of each other. They prayed for each other instead of criticizing each other. They encouraged rather than slandered each other. There were special reasons which drew them into close spiritual fellowship. They lived in a hostile world. In Christian fellowship they found a powerful means of sustaining their spirituality. They appreciated the communion of saints. They faithfully attended meetings for mutual counsel, exhortations, and spiritual fellowship. They regarded themselves as members of a brotherhood, whose rules they were bound to obey, and whose interests they were obligated to promote.

3. Steadfast in the breaking of bread.

This has reference to the Lord's Supper. They were faithful in their obedience to the dying command of their Master. They were not careless in their observance of the Memorial Supper. None of them dared or wished to turn his back upon the Lord's Supper. What a pity that many today wilfully act as if the charge, "This do," had never been uttered!

4. Steadfast in praying.

They literally lived in the spirit of prayer. Prayer was the weapon by which they conquered their foes. It was the highway along which they proceeded to victory. It was the connecting link between the seen and the unseen, between earth and heaven. There wasn't any question about their faithfulness in attendance upon the public prayer services.

II. Reverence. Acts. 2:43.

"Fear came upon every soul." They felt God was near, because of the "wonders and signs". Fear of God in the heart brings force or power in the world. God has always visited His faithful followers with power. The Christians of the first century were power-conscious, whereas many today are problem-conscious.

III. Generosity. Acts 2:44-45.

All that believed were faithful in attendance at church. Nobody offered any excuse for his absence because all "were together." They were mentally and spiritually united. They were one in spirit. What one felt all felt. They wept with those who wept, and they rejoiced with those who rejoiced. Selfishness had no place among them. Their benevolence inspired them to make sacrifices. The love of property in them gave way to the love of man. "They sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need."

IV. Gladness. Acts 2:46.

They were all of one accord. They were united. There was perfect harmony. No critic broke the fellowship. No drones, nor negative souls padded their rolls. No oversensitive ones had to be handled with special care.

Such harmony is always beautiful, whether found in children at play, in the home circle, or in the church. To break such fellowship is Satan's first and chief attack on a church.

They "did eat their meat with gladness." Their hearts exulted with joy. The rich were happy, for their benevolent spirit was gratified in giving. The poor were happy, for their hearts glowed with gratitude in receiving. All were happy in themselves, happy with each other, because they were happy in Christ.

They were filled with joy, even though they had enough to make them sad. They went to their task singing, though they had enough to make them weep. If they were imprisoned and beaten, they sang in the jail. If they were released they rejoiced, not because they were free, but because they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake. When Ridley and his two martyr companions were burned in the streets of Oxford, he said to his comrades in fire, "Cheer up, my brothers, we will light a fire today that will illumine all of England." And they did.

V. Success. Acts 2:47.

1. Their influence was great.
"They had favor with all the people." Their spirit and conduct commanded the esteem of the people around them.
2. Their growth was constant.
People were added to the church daily.
3. Their increase was due to divine power.
The Lord added them to the church after He had saved them.