

Equipped For Work

Harmony M.B.C., December 23, 2007 (Morning)

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Acts 2:42-47

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a kind of spiritual organism. As the bible describes it in 1 Cor. and in Ephesians, we see the members being compared to hands and feet (1 Cor. 12) and the actions of the church to be like a human body in function and form. This is a wonderful truth that the Lord has revealed and it is a wonderful truth that we as church members get to experience as we interact with each other in the service and worship of the Lord. We truly are a spiritual entity empowered by the Holy Spirit sent by Christ to enable us to function as a unit in accomplishing His purposes.

We have in our text an account of how things were just after Pentecost with the Lord's church. This was the beginning of the church's public and private ministry after the Lord's return to heaven. While He was here, the church functioned as it were, behind Him. We read of the church before Pentecost and it was already doing great things, but as Jesus promised to them while He walked with them, it was due to do greater works after His ascension. Now, where our text is, Peter had just preached that great sermon that resulted in 3,000 souls being added to the church and we see an account of how things were immediately following this.

We all know this was a one-time event. It will not be repeated. It doesn't have to be repeated. This was the time of the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower the Lord's church, and that power and presence is still here. And just like then, the Holy Spirit has the commission from Christ to enable us as His church here at Harmony to do what He has set us in this community to do. But, we need equipment for this task. We need to be equipped with the spiritual implements that the first church at Jerusalem had. If we have those spiritual tools, we can go on to do things for our Master. If we have retired any of those tools, or if we refuse to use them, then our work will be hampered or it will fail.

This morning, let's consider what we find the first church exhibiting and let us, as His church here, determine to follow that same path in our effort to please our Lord and do His work.

I. V. 42 - Steadfastness in Things That Mattered - these were:

a. Apostles Doctrine- In these latter years some religionists have made doctrine a dirty word, but the bible teaches that doctrine is inseparable from the message of the gospel. The apostles doctrine is nothing less than the teachings about the gospel and the Christian ethic. Paul in Romans 6 makes the form of this doctrine to be the tool used by the Lord to bring believers to salvation. **Rom 6:17-18** But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. 18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

The first church was steadfast in attending to the **Apostles doctrine**. **Lesson:** it pays a church in

spiritual benefits to pay attention to what is taught by spiritual leaders. All too many churches (which of course means its members) forget what their ministers teach. But, to be equipped to do the Lord's work as a church, it takes more than the preacher being versed in the Apostle's doctrine. One of the saddest testimonies in the world is the testimony of a church that reveals that it knows nothing about what the preacher regularly teaches about the principles of God.

b. Fellowship - the first church was steadfast in its practice of fellowship. Nothing binds a church together like fellowship. Fellowship in God's word; fellowship in suffering; fellowship in rejoicing; fellowship in sharing of common things together. Such activity equips a church to be able to recommend herself to visitors and presents a face of solidarity to the world. Nothing discourages a person from joining himself with a church more than to see that there is no fellowship among the members.

c. Breaking of Bread - I believe that here the Holy Spirit meant the Lord's Supper. The first church was steadfast about observing the Lord's Supper; they were undoubtedly steadfast about how they observed it, both as to the state of mind and heart and as to the method or approach they used in taking it. A church should always be in a state to take the Lord's Supper. We need to take the Lord's Supper regularly. We need to observe it here. It has been some time. I have been praying about it. Observing the Lord's Supper is a very solemn and meaningful event for one of the Lord's churches. It is the time when we collectively focus deeply on our Lord's sacrifice of Himself; His offering of His body and His blood for our salvation. This observance equips a church to communicate among its members about this great sacrifice and it equips her to convey the meaningfulness of Christ's sacrifice to those on the outside.

d. Prayers - The first church was steadfast in prayers. They would not be turned or deterred from offering prayers. The whole idea of this being presented in this way is to advertise that they were steadfast in public prayer. We can almost see them beginning any gathering with prayer, richly interspersing prayer during ongoing worship or fellowship times; always adding prayer to all their doings. Prayer equips a church to do great things for the Lord. Prayer gets churches in a right spiritual frame; prayer petitions God to act largely for the church; prayer fulfills the commandments of our Lord to pray; prayer as a body of baptized believers knits us together in a common cause and with a common focus. Prayer is a church's lifeline to the Lord. Without it no access to the great arsenal of God is available; no access to the spiritual food stores of God can be found. A church without meaningful, fervent, frequent, spiritually empowered prayer is a church in a spiritual desert.

II. V. 43 - Fear

This church was seeing some really fantastic things happening as the Holy Spirit worked in their midst.

The apostles were able to speak with great power and authority

Many souls which had been opposed to Christ and had actually been instrumental in His death were suddenly stricken with repentance and were looking for answers

Many of those same souls became believers in one huge conversion event on the day of Pentecost.

Those Jews who remained enemies of Christ and of this movement were suddenly showing fear also

Wonders and signs were done by the apostles

A lot of things were great evidence that a mighty God was working among them. The things they saw could not be denied. Those who were new creatures in Christ could feel in their spiritual selves the presence and power of Jesus Christ.

None of the things I named are unfolding here in this day. So, how can we get to this place of healthy fear? All it takes is coming face to face with some truths.

The same great God with great power is working here today - if we don't feel a reverent fear about that then we have gotten case hardened in service to Him

Great sermons are being preached and souls are still being saved

Many enemies are still being held at bay by our Lord's own hand today - knowing what power it takes to do that should fill us with a reverent fear because of the overwhelming power of our Lord.

Scripture says in **Psalms 111:10**, "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom:"

In this age of grace, when so many people are preaching about the love of God, maybe churches too often forget that their wisdom is inseparably connected with fear of the Lord.

Too many believers think that fear and love cannot coexist, and cite 1 John 4:8, "...perfect love casteth out fear." But, being imperfect as we are in our love to God, then we do well to fear God with the kind of reverent fear that gives us access to wisdom.

III. Vv. 44-45 - Selflessness and Sacrifice

First: There is no bible indication that this behavior is expected of Christians today. The apostles did not command this of the people. It was their expression of their recognition of equality among themselves and recognition of need for some and ability to meet that need for others.

There's no other record of this being done at other churches.

There's a record right here in the text that should give us insight into the sensible management of this kind of sacrifice. (V. 46 tells us that individual church members still maintained homes and so we can understand that this account probably relates to excess real estate, overabundance of real estate, and other possessions, etc.).

What is this message for us:

This record illustrates a church which watches out for its own and where each member is willing to make sacrifices to help other members.

This kind of spirit empowers a church with compassion and a sacrificial attitude

This equips a church with a heart for giving and caring; by that they are equipped to make progress for Christ.

There is a story about the Churches in Macedonia as told by Paul in 1 Cor

In that account he tells us how those churches gave a love offering for the poor saints although they were for the most part poverty stricken themselves. In that account, he says something in verse 5 that gives us deep insight into how a selfless, sacrificial spirit is empowered within each of us. **Let's read about that: 2Cor 8:1-5** Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; 2

How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. 3 For to *their* power, I bear record, yea, and beyond *their* power *they were* willing of themselves; 4 Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and *take upon us* the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5 And *this they did*, not as we hoped, **but first gave their own selves to the Lord**, and unto us by the will of God.

IV. V. 46 - Unity

Unity among more than 3,000 people, regardless of the fact that they are all saved, is astounding

It shows the power that Christ has in the lives of people who are really dedicated to Him
It therefore shows what can actually be accomplished when church members are ALL submissive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

All schism, contention, and confusion in a church results when at least one member is led of human motive tweaked by the devil

With so much worldliness and false doctrine in churches today, contention and disunity are the norm

If a church is to be equipped to do something for Jesus, there must be unity.

The bible says (Psa 133:1)...” Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

But, such unity is not gained nor kept without effort on the part of church members and so scripture also says (Eph 4:3) **“Endeavoring** to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

V. V. 47 - Praise

Psalms 34:1 - “I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise *shall continually be in my mouth.*”