

Acts 2:42-47

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Introduction: **Read Acts 2:41**

- I. 2:42 Basic Elements of Church Life

A. Think of this as a standard by which to measure our Christianity. How do you measure up to the standard of the early church? They continued “steadfastly” in [being earnest, devoted towards; constantly diligent; attending assiduously to; giving unremitting care to, persevering in] all of the following:

- i. Apostles' Teaching: Notice it does not say “the apostles continued steadfastly in their teaching” but that **the church continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching**.
 - a) The Holy Spirit has preserved this teaching for us. We call it the Bible. Specifically they started with Hebrew Scriptures – our Old Testament – and explained how they pointed to Jesus. They then encouraged people to believe in Him, explaining His death and resurrection. They went on to prophecies of His return, the coming judgment and the age to come. Finally, they added teaching on how we should live in light of all this – teaching us right from wrong so that our lives would bring glory to God. And this is the New Testament.
 - b) When you devote yourself to the Bible – the Old and New Testaments – you are devoting yourself to the same “Apostles' Teaching” that they had in the early church.
 - c) Personally, I hope I am a very *unoriginal* Bible teacher, because you don't need a single thing that I can make up on my own. You just need to know and believe and understand what's written right here already on the pages of this Book.
- ii. Fellowship (*koinonía*): association, community, joint participation, intimacy, sharing in one another's lives. This describes the relationship they had with one another. We might say they were deeply connected to one another, they loved to hang out together; the believers were inseparable friends.
 - a) Does that describe the relationship you have with other Christians? I hope it does.
- iii. Breaking of Bread: the Lord's Supper, or the *agape* meal (love feast)? Actually it is not *either or*, but *both and*. In the beginning, when the early church would meet together, they would very often share a common meal. As part of this meal they would pass the bread and the cup and remember Christ's death. Gradually, a bifurcation or separation set in. This probably happened for two reasons:
 - a) Abuse of the food and drink brought for the meals.
 - b) Increased ritualism pertaining to the Lord's supper

iv. Prayers: The new believers of the early church continued steadfastly in prayers.

Ephesians 6:18 (NLT) Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere.

Colossians 4:2 (NKJV) Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NKJV) Pray without ceasing.

II. 2:43 Fear and the Power of God

A. The first thing mentioned is fear, that's the "fear of God".

i. When God is at work in powerful ways, the natural result in those who witness it is a healthy fear of God. In the days of King Jehoshaphat of Judah, God defeated the nation's enemies. We then read the following report:

2 Chronicles 20:29 (NKJV) And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel.

ii. That's the kind of fear we're seeing here – amazement at what God is doing.

a) NLT: *"A deep sense of awe came over them all..."*

b) NASB: *"Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe..."*

III. 2:44-45 Sharing Possessions

A. Pointing to this passage, some have held up the concept of communal living as the ideal for the church. That isn't necessarily the case.

B. This Christian sharing was motivated by those who had the possessions selling what they had to help others. Contrast this with the communism of the 20th century, which was motivated by the poor taking from the rich and often killing or imprisoning them to make that happen. The fear of God motivates people to give, atheism motivates people to take.

C. We don't read of this happening later in the Gentile churches. Nor did it solve the problem in Jerusalem as we find Paul later taking collections among the Gentiles to help the poor brethren in Judea.

D. This sharing may have been needed at first especially because many of these first believers were from far off places, but stayed in Jerusalem after Pentecost to be instructed in their faith. They may have soon run out of money, but were not yet ready to go back home.

E. Also, in Jerusalem, some level of persecution began immediately, so some of these first believers may have lost their jobs when they expressed their faith in Christ.

IV. 2:46-47 Routine Christianity

A. *daily ... in the temple, and ... from house to house*

- i. **Daily** Believers were getting together every day. This was not a requirement. They wanted to be together. Do you find it disappointing that once a week is now too often for many Christians?

1 John 3:14 (NKJV) We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren...

One of the evidences John gives for the genuineness of our faith is our love for other believers. Don't you just enjoy being around the people you love?

- ii. **In the temple** The church began with frequent larger public gatherings. This made evangelism easy, because people always knew where they could find them. This probably lasted right up until 70 A.D., when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed.
 - a) Nor was this kind of thing only in Jerusalem. Take the example of Paul in Ephesus:

Acts 19:8-10 (NKJV) And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

- iii. **From house to house** Home fellowships are not a new concept. If anything we might say a church completely devoid of home fellowships as we often see in modern times is relatively new. From the get go the church regularly met in homes.
 - a) In the NT Priscilla and Aquila are a married couple that loved to host gatherings of the church. Paul mentions them in Romans and 1 Corinthians. Philemon also did.
 - b) In times of persecution, this is a very handy practice. Hostile governments can confiscate church property more easily than they can people's homes.
 - c) Presently, some try to emphasize house churches as the exclusive way to go for the most authentic NT Christianity. That's really a bit imbalanced, if we consider what we just talked about regarding the temple, public meetings, etc.

B. *breaking bread ... they ate their food* There go those Christians, eating together again. Jesus started it. He loved to eat with His friends – and not just in the Gospels. Check out Genesis 18 when the Lord appears to Abraham with two angels. The Lord didn't even start talking business until Abraham brought Him a meal. Only then, after supper, did He get to the subject of Sarah giving birth to Isaac and Sodom being destroyed.

C. *Praising God* Is praising God a normal part of your life? It was for these people. I think there are a lot of Christians that never get around to praising God except when the musicians put the words in their mouths on Sundays.

D. Having favor with all the people. God gave them favor. But then again, these were people that loved God and one another – and that love added weight to their witness.

E. *The Lord added to the church* That statement speaks for itself.

The following description of the early church was written by the philosopher Aristides and presented to the Roman emperor in the early 2nd Century:

Now the Christians, O King, by going about and seeking, have found the truth. For they know and trust in God, the Maker of heaven and earth, who has no fellow. From him they received those commandments which they have engraved on their minds, and which they observe in the hope and expectation of the world to come.

For this reason they do not commit adultery or immorality; they do not bear false witness, or embezzle, nor do they covet what is not theirs. They honor father and mother, and do good to those who are their neighbors. Whenever they are judges, they judge uprightly. They do not worship idols made in the image of man. Whatever they do not wish that others should do to them, they in turn do not do; and they do not eat the food sacrificed to idols.

Those who oppress them they exhort and make them their friends. They do good to their enemies. Their wives, O King, are pure as virgins, and their daughters are modest. Their men abstain from all unlawful sexual contact and from impurity, in the hope of recompense that is to come in another world.

As for their bondmen and bondwomen, and their children, if there are any, they persuade them to become Christians; and when they have done so, they call them brethren without distinction.

They refuse to worship strange gods; and they go their way in all humility and cheerfulness. Falsehood is not found among them. They love one another; the widow's needs are not ignored, and they rescue the orphan from the person who does him violence. He who has gives to him who has not, ungrudgingly and without boasting. When the Christians find a stranger, they bring him to their homes and rejoice over him as a true brother. They do not call brothers those who are bound by blood ties alone, but those who are brethren after the Spirit and in God.

When one of their poor passes away from the world, each provides for his burial according to his ability. If they hear of any of their number who are imprisoned or oppressed for the name of the Messiah, they all provide for his needs, and if it is possible to redeem him, they set him free.

If they find poverty in their midst, and they do not have spare food, they fast two or three days in order that the needy might be supplied with the necessities. They observe scrupulously the commandments of their Messiah, living honestly and soberly as the Lord their God ordered them. Every morning and every hour they praise and thank God for his goodness to them; and for their food and drink they offer thanksgiving.

If any righteous person of their number passes away from the world, they rejoice and thank God, and escort his body as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby. When a child is born to one of them, they praise God. If it dies in infancy, they thank God the more, as for one who has passed through the world without sins. But if one of them dies in his iniquity or in his sins, they grieve bitterly and sorrow as over one who is about to meet his doom.

Such, O King, is the commandment given to the Christians, and such is their conduct.

*The Apology of Aristides, translated by Rendel Harris [London: Cambridge, 1893]
– Quoted in John MacArthur's New Testament Commentary Acts 1-12*