

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 1-6-13 AM NOTES
"THE MODEL CHURCH"
ACTS 2:42-47
#1 in Series, "The Church as It Was Meant to Function"

Acts 2:41 (NKJV) "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them."

I. The Model Church Was a Steadfast Church (v. 42a)

"Steadfastly"—A single minded faithfulness to a course of action

John 8:31b (HCSB) "If you continue in My word, you really are My disciples."

1 John 2:19 (NKJV) "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us."

"The first indication of new, divine life is a drawing together of people who have this life in common."

—Martyn Lloyd-Jones

II. The Model Church Was a Teaching Church (v. 42b)

2 Timothy 2:2 (NKJV) "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to **teach** others also."

1 Peter 2:2 (NKJV) "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."

III. The Model Church Was a Fellowship-Intensive Church (v. 42c)

Romans 12:10 (NKJV) "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another."

Colossians 3:13 (NKJV) "bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*."

Fellowship is affectionate shared life with others who are partners together in a common mission or cause.

IV. The Model Church Was a Gospel-Centered Church (v. 42d)

V. The Model Church Was a Praying Church (v. 42e)

Hebrews 4:13b (HCSB) "...all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account."

VI. The Model Church Was an Awe-Inspiring Church (v. 43)

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VIII. The Model Church Was a Balanced Church (v. 46)

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“THE MODEL CHURCH”

ACTS 2:42-47

#1 in Series, “The Church as It Was Meant to Function”

In our recent Elder’s get away for planning, we spent much time in prayer and seeking God for the vision He has for FBC in 2013. We examined where we have been in recent years and where He leading us. We believe that the vision this year needs to be focused on small groups. You’ll be hearing much more as we go through the year, but we want to see a drastic rise in the percentage of worship attendees that are involved in a small group of some kind (traditional Sunday School classes, groups meeting in homes, groups meeting other times than Sunday mornings and at other locations through the week). We are convinced that one of the best ways to obey the Great Commission in our local area is through small groups. I’ll share some details as we go through this 3 part series.

Speaking for all of the Elders of this church, our consuming, controlling, constant desire for First Baptist Church is that we be a biblical church. If we have to choose between being biblical and growing, we choose being biblical. If we have to choose between anything and being biblical, we choose biblical. Perhaps we have the clearest picture in the Bible of what a biblical church looks like when we examine this brief cameo of life in the first church that was formed on the Day of Pentecost. Here we see the newborn church in its purity of devotion to the risen Lord Jesus that has perhaps never been matched. It was on the day of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit came in a new way on all those who had repented of their sin and savingly believed on Jesus Christ. There were 120 of Jesus’ disciples waiting in an upper room on the coming of the Holy Spirit just like Jesus told them to. These faithful 120 disciples experienced three things on that day of Pentecost. First, they were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. They were placed in union with Christ and thus became partakers of His eternal life. This was a union with the Son of God like nothing that had ever happened before. Second, they were indwelt by the Spirit of Christ just as He had promised them. They no longer had the person of Christ beside them, but they had something better; they had the Spirit of Christ inside them. Third, these 120 disciples now were filled with (empowered by, permeated by, and controlled by) the Holy Spirit. The Lord gave three signs that the church was now birthed and the Spirit had come. First, there was a sound like a mighty rushing wind. Second, there were tongues of fire resting over the heads of the believers, and third, they spoke in recognized languages that they had not learned through study. When these things happened, a great crowd gathered and Peter took the opportunity to preach to them. As Peter preached a very simple sermon, the Holy Spirit moved upon the congregation and we read in **Acts 2:41 (NKJV)** “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*.” In the span of an hour or so that infant church had grown from 120 to 3,120! What do these Apostles of Christ do with 3,000 spiritual babies? In verses 42-47 we see what God did through the leaders of the church to develop these new disciples into mature disciples that moved out from Jerusalem and impacted much of the civilized world in one generation. This first church is our model; it is the pattern for the church today. Even with all of our sophistication and all of our technology and all of our education, we cannot improve on this example from the first church after the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost.

Let’s examine some characteristics of this first church that we would do well to pattern this church after.

I. The Model Church Was a Steadfast Church (V42a)

The Greek word translated “steadfastly” means to endure, to cleave faithfully to someone or something. One definition of the word is “a single minded faithfulness to a course of action.” In the ESV it is translated “they devoted themselves to”. All 3,000 people who came to Christ after Peter’s sermon obeyed the command to be baptized as a testimony and demonstration of their union with Christ. By the way, in the New Testament, it is clear that baptism does not save, but it is also clear that the early church knew nothing of a person who claimed to be a Christian and refused to publically profess and demonstrate their

new relationship with Christ through baptism. Baptism was simply the first step for these new believers. Now, they continued steadfastly; they continually devoted themselves to the Lord and the things that He ordained to bring about their spiritual growth. The clearest evidence of a genuine salvation is communicated in that phrase “continued steadfastly”. Jesus said the same thing in **John 8:31 (HCSB)** “If you continue in My word, you really are My disciples.” One of the tests of 1 John (a book written for the express purpose that we might have assurance – 1 John 5:13) is that those who are truly Christ’s continue steadfastly growing and gathering with God’s people. **1 John 2:19 (NKJV)** “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” John is speaking of a person who has made a final turning from the Lord and His people, the church. As we are going to see as we go along in the message, these 3,000 didn’t need a command to assemble themselves together with other believers. This was their desire and their delight. They were getting together, not weekly, but daily! I love coming to church. It’s not because I’m one of the Pastors; I love being with you! If going to church is simply something you are doing out of duty and to stay out of trouble with God, then either there is something wrong with you or something is wrong with your church. Martyn Lloyd-Jones summarized it like this: “The first indication of new, divine life is a drawing together of people who have this life in common.” [Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authentic Christianity*, Page 92].

II. The Model Church Was a Teaching Church (V42b)

Let’s first establish what the “apostles’ doctrine” was. That is very easy to ascertain. It was what the apostles taught that became our New Testament. It was the apostles going back into what we call the Old Testament and showing how everything that happened to Jesus and everything that Jesus taught was grounded there. Every book of the New Testament was written by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle. Verse 42 is saying that they continued steadfastly in the teaching of the Old and New Testaments. The Greek word translated here “doctrine” is translated in other places “teaching”. Doctrine is simply teaching. Teaching was the first priority of this model church. It took priority over fellowship and prayer. That is not to in any way minimize the importance of fellowship and prayer. Fellowship (genuine fellowship) is dependent on teaching, on doctrine. As we will see more clearly in a moment, fellowship happens among a group of people who are partners in the common commitment to obey what the Lord **teaches** them to do. Powerful prayer is not grounded in emotion or the circumstances of the moment, but in doctrine. Powerful prayer is praying the Scriptures! It is seeking God’s power to obey what we see in Scripture; it is asking God to do in and through us what He has commanded and promised in His word. Teaching is the key to the multiplication of the church. The passage we will be looking at next week is **2 Timothy 2:2 (NKJV)** “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to **teach** others also.” A hunger and love for the Word of God is a sign of genuine salvation. **1 Peter 2:2 (NKJV)** “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby”. These first converts after the church was established had heard the Gospel and now they discovered that there was more! They no doubt hung on every word afraid that they would miss something. I have seen that kind of hunger. I have seen it very infrequently here in the Bible belt, but I have seen it teaching in “third world” countries. I remember teaching church leaders about 7 hours a day for several days in a row in a church in West Africa. I was teaching through an interpreter (which is a challenge). It was in the afternoon and the church was hot and I was worn out. I turned to my interpreter and asked him to tell the 150 or so people there that we were going to take a break. I turned around to get a drink of water and could hear the crowd talking among themselves. I asked the translator what they were saying. He said, “They are upset because you have stopped; they want to continue”. I chugged down a little more water and with energy that only the Lord could give continued on as they continued feverously taking notes. Their interest was not because of my eloquence. Only a few could even understand English. It was the translator they were listening to. It was because I was teaching them the apostles’ doctrine – the basics of the faith. Oh how I long to see a hunger like that here. There are many other things that are important in the church, but the teaching, the apostles’ doctrine is of first priority.

III. The Model Church Was a Fellowship Intensive Church (V42c)

I've said this multiple times before, but I am convinced that fellowship is one of the most misunderstood and misused words in the church. The Greek word translated "fellowship" is the idea of sharing in common with others. The foundation of fellowship is the common life in Christ (eternal life) that we share. The activity of fellowship in the church is seen in the "one another's" of the New Testament. Some examples of the many "one another's" are **Romans 12:10 (NKJV)** "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another". **Colossians 3:13 (NKJV)** "bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*." **1 Peter 1:22b (NKJV)** "...love one another fervently with a pure heart". That is the foundation and activity of fellowship, but what is fellowship? It is not easy to define. Here is my best attempt. **Fellowship is affectionate shared life with others who are partners together with us in a common mission or cause.** I'm sure someone else could come up with a better definition, but that's the best I can do. This is what people are looking for – sadly, even people in the church. Here is my opinion as to why it is so rare. People are looking for that affectionate shared life with others (that would include close friendships) but most are not willing to pour their lives out in a common mission or cause. Here is something that I have observed over the 36 years I have been a Pastor. The greatest fellowship in the church seems to happen in two areas. First it happens between those who do mission trips together. Why? It is because there is a reliance and a trust involved and there is a common focus on a common mission or cause. The second place that I have seen fellowship happen is in a Sunday School class or small group that is active in not just teaching the word, but in doing ministry together. I don't see it so much in groups where people just come and listen.

IV. The Model Church Was a Gospel Centered Church (V42d)

Most every New Testament Scholar that I have read agrees that this was not talking about just sharing meals with one another; it was referring to celebrating the Lord's Supper together. The reason that the Lord gave his church the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper was to keep their minds stayed on Him and the Gospel. Every time a person is baptized we see the Gospel pictured – by grace through faith we have been saved and put into union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Every time we take the Lord's Supper, we are reminded not only of Christ and what He has provided for us through His death, we are also reminded of the Gospel – by grace through faith the body of Christ was beaten and crucified by man and suffered the wrath of God for our sins. His blood (poured out life) shed for us has cleansed us of all sin. Not only does the church hear the Gospel as the apostles' doctrine is taught, they are constantly reminded of the Gospel as they take the Lord's Supper.

V. The Model Church Was a Praying Church (V42e)

Prayer, persevering, diligent, powerful prayer is one of the most difficult things that we do. That becomes obvious when we look at most any church today and see the attendance when they have a seminar on prayer and the attendance when they have a prayer meeting. It is true that we need to be taught how to pray – I believe that is why the first priority in the church is the teaching of the apostles' doctrine which certainly deals with how to pray. But even with instruction, prayer is difficult. True, biblical, powerful prayer involves humbling ourselves and confessing that without Him we can do nothing. Prayer takes us into God's presence in a special way, and we read in **Hebrews 4:13b (HCSB)** "...all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account." Genuine prayer does not focus on making requests to make our lives more comfortable, but on the wisdom and power that we need to glorify God in every situation. John Piper describes prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie to get in touch with headquarters for the supplies we need to carry out the mission we have been given, but he says that the church has turned prayer into an intercom from the den to the kitchen that is used by those in the den to call up to the kitchen to send down more "goodies". When we read through the book of Acts, we find that this early church prayed about most everything. It actually says "the prayers" (ESV) which implies that it

was a regular part of their meeting together. When they were persecuted, they prayed (Acts 4:23-31), when they set apart Deacons for the ministry of the church, they prayed for them (Acts 6:6), when their leader, Peter was arrested, they prayed (Acts 12:5), and when they were going to send out missionaries, they prayed for God to show them who to send (Acts 13:2-3). Prayer was woven in the fabric of this model church.

VI. The Model Church Was an Awe Inspiring Church (V43 “fear” is translated “awe” in most translations)

Before the New Testament canon of Scripture was affirmed and widely distributed, God used signs and wonders to evidence the authority of the early church. While God may choose to do signs and wonders today, our authority is from the completed Word of God. Today that sense of awe should be more evident as people see the changed lives of believers and hear the inspired Word of God spoken through His people. Notice that the awe was not because of their buildings, their Hollywood like productions, or anything that was of human origin. The awe was because of the supernatural change in lives and the obvious work of God among them.

VII. The Model Church Was a Sharing Church (V44-45)

Someone called this “Christian Communism” and they were really wrong. This was Christian stewardship and love in action. The people recognized that everything they laid claim to was in reality God’s and with hearts of love they distributed God’s resources wherever He said to distribute them. This was a special situation. There were likely many among that 3,000 who were saved who were from far away and had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. It was imperative that before they went to their homeland that they were discipled (taught the apostles’ doctrine and experienced genuine fellowship and saw the supernatural work of the Lord). It is likely that many of the early churches around the Roman Empire were started by some of these Jews who were saved on the Day of Pentecost and went back home and began to proclaim the Gospel. To provide for the needs of these new converts from across the Empire, much funds were needed and God provided through those who had more than enough for themselves and their families.

VIII. The Model Church Was a Balanced Church (V46)

I don’t think that I am reading too much into this verse by seeing a pattern here that applies to the church today. The early church did not have buildings until the third century. Here is the pattern of how they functioned. They would meet in mass in probably one of the courts of the temple mount – perhaps in the court of the Gentiles or another of the areas on the temple grounds that would have accommodated such a large group. Remember that this first church formed on the Day of Pentecost was all Jews, so they were well within their rights to meet on the temple grounds. In addition to the large congregational gather, likely to listen to one of the apostles, they met in homes in cells or small groups. There, they worshipped (the Lord’s Supper) and ate meals together and no doubt were taught the apostles’ doctrine in a more intimate setting. It would likely have involved discussion, prayers, meeting of needs and plans to take the Gospel to others.

I believe that this is a principle for how the church should operate. First, the large congregation and then the smaller cell groups. This is roughly the equivalent of our worship service and Sunday School or other small group. There must be the congregation and the cell. There are things that take place in the congregation that can’t be duplicated in the cell and vice versa. That is why it is imperative that you be in the congregation and also that you be in a small group. Fellowship and unity and relationships are not developed in the worship service; those happen in small groups! There is, however, a dynamic of worship and encouragement and a type of teaching that takes place in a worship Service that cannot be duplicated in a small group. Over the next couple of weeks you will be hearing about opportunities for involvement in leading and participating in small groups.

CONCLUSION

Notice the result of the activity and work of this model church (Verse 46b, 47). What church would not want those results? We cannot manufacture them with man made programs and methods. This is the church I long for us to be. Will you join me in seeking to honor the Lord with a 21st century church that follows the model of the first church?