



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ◇ DEO ◇ GLORIA

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

The Day of Pentecost, Part 4

The Sermon of Peter, Part III

Acts 2:37-47

March 4, 2007

- I. **The Gospel is Convicting**
- II. **The Gospel Saves**
- III. **The Gospel Unites**

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I. **The Gospel is Convicting**

- Luke states, in Verse 37, ‘Now when they **heard *this*...**’
 - Notice the focus on **hearing**.

‘So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.’ Romans 10:17

- Notice also what Peter does not do in his sermon. He does not manipulate his audience with tactics and measures intended to cause a desired response. Rather, **he simply proclaims the Gospel**.
- Notice, as well, that he does not even offer a formal ‘invitation’ [not that they are inherently bad]. His message is the invitation. It is God who calls men to Himself through the instrument of the Word of God – the faithful proclamation of the Gospel.

‘For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.’ Romans 1:16

- Luke, then, states that the crowd was ‘pierced to the heart...’
 - In other words, they were deeply convicted by their sin and the truth of the Gospel message. They realized that the Messiah, the Christ, had come, and they murdered Him. This phrase implies that the people were overwhelmed with guilt over what

they had done. This, of course, is one of the first signs of conversion – that one is aware of his or her sin.

- This was nothing Peter had the ability to do; rather, it was the Holy Spirit, through the instrument of the Word of God [Gospel message] that pierced the people to the heart.
- Then, the people said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’
 - This is a powerful question from the people to Peter and the apostles. The reason is because the people did not need to be prompted to ask, ‘What shall we do?’ They were not coerced by Peter to ask this question. Rather, Peter simply proclaimed the true Gospel message; the Holy Spirit convicted the people; and the people were then actively asking Peter and the apostles ‘What shall we do?’
 - Because God saved them, through the faithful proclamation of the Word, nothing was going to stop them from seeking after the things of God. Too often it seems that our approach to preaching and evangelizing is so formulaic that it is as though we do not trust the Holy Spirit’s effective ability to regenerate and convict those whom He has called.
- Peter replies, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’
 - This passage has caused a great deal of confusion in the Church throughout the centuries because the rather peculiar manner in which Peter answers the question of the crowd.
 - Notice that Peter does not say, ‘Oh, don’t worry about it, you are saved.’ Rather, **Peter instructs them in the way of obedience.**
 - Although we are absolutely NOT saved **by** our good works, we are saved **unto** them. In other words, if we are saved, we will do good works out of our love for God.
 - The phrase, ‘Repent, **and each of you be baptized in the name of Christ for the forgiveness of sins...**’ has been the primary source of confusion in the Church regarding this Verse.
 - Taken, at first glance, how many of the modern English translations render this Verse, it seems to possibly teach baptismal regeneration [i.e., you must be baptized (by immersion) in order to be saved]. Yet, this would violate the essential biblical truth of salvation by grace [alone] through faith [alone].
 - However, given the Greek in this Verse, it can be translated in one of two ways. The two different renderings center around the Greek word **eis** [εἰς], ‘which could indicate purpose and thus be taken to mean that baptism is the

prerequisite for the forgiveness of sins...however...*eis* can also mean *on the ground of, on the basis of*, which would indicate the opposite relationship – that the forgiveness of sins is the basis, the grounds for being baptized.’ John Polhill

- ❖ Given these two possibilities for the word *eis*, Acts 2:28 could be translated either:
 - 1.) ‘be baptized in the name of Christ **for** the forgiveness of sins’; or, more likely,
 - 2.) ‘be baptized in the name of Christ **on the basis of** the forgiveness of sins.’
- The second option ‘**on the basis of**’, given the full counsel of Scripture, is most certainly what is meant. But also, in the writings of Luke, forgiveness of sins and repentance are tightly linked, independent of the act of baptism (Luke 24:47; Acts 3:19; 5:31). Furthermore, nowhere else in Acts is baptism presented as the instrumental cause of forgiveness; however, forgiveness is directly linked to faith and repentance (10:43; 13:38; 26:18).
- Therefore, baptism is then something that demonstrates outwardly something that has occurred [by the Spirit] inwardly – a transformation of nature.
- Further, the focus here is on **repentance** not baptism. Repentance is ‘a complete change of heart, a spiritual about-face, was essential if those who had failed to recognize their God-sent deliverer in Jesus were nevertheless to enjoy the deliverance which he had come to procure for them and was now offering them from his place of exaltation.’ F.F. Bruce
 - In this context, also, ‘repentance’ involves a change of heart with respect to, not only their individual sins, but with respect to the personal works and claims of Jesus, the Christ – whom they crucified.
 - It is as though Peter is saying, ‘God is coming in judgment like a mighty wave. You will not win. Therefore, you must agree with Him, join Him, by confessing your sins...repenting, if you are to be saved from His coming wrath.’
- In this command, Peter also states something that has generated a great deal of confusion as well: ‘be baptized **in the name of Jesus...**’
 - Some groups will claim that one must be baptized *in the name of Jesus* [ONLY] in order to be saved.’ Yet, this, too, reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of salvation, saving grace, and this very passage.

- As the great theologian John Stott writes, to be baptized in the name of Jesus means, ‘submitting to the humiliation of baptism, which the Jews regarded as necessary for Gentile converts only, and submitting to it in the name of the very person they had previously rejected.’
- It would be difficult to require these Jews to submit to a greater act of humiliation than to identify with the One they had demanded only a few weeks early be crucified.
- Further, baptism in the name of Jesus means ‘by his authority, acknowledging his claims, subscribing to his doctrines, engaging in his service, and relying on his merits.’ I. Alexander

‘The baptism of the Spirit which it was our Lord’s [Christ’s] prerogative to bestow was, strictly speaking, something that took place once for all on the day of Pentecost when he poured out the promised gift on his disciples and thus constituted them the people of God in the new age; baptism in water continued to be the visible sign by which those who believed the gospel, repented their sins, and acknowledged Jesus as Lord were publicly incorporated into the Spirit-baptized fellowship of the new people of God.’
F.F. Bruce

‘[Baptism in the name of Jesus is] not to the exclusion of the Father, and of the Spirit, in whose name also this ordinance is to be administered, ([Matthew 28:19](#)) but the name of Jesus Christ is particularly mentioned, because of these Jews, who had before rejected and denied him as the Messiah; but now, upon their repentance and faith, they are to be baptized in his name, by his authority, according to his command; professing their faith in him, devoting themselves to him, and calling on his name. The end for which this was to be submitted to, is, for the remission of sins;’
John Gill

II. The Gospel Saves

- Peter concludes Verse 8 with ‘and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’
 - In other words, the ‘gift of the Spirit’ *necessarily* accompanies true repentance.
 - When we receive the gift of repentance, we also receive the greatest miracle, the greatest gift that we can ever receive – God Himself. Too often, we promote salvation as what it is *not* – eternity in Hell, rather than what it is – eternal communion with God, for this is the essence of eternal life (John 17:3).
 - In his defense of the doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of the Holy Spirit, Jonathan Edwards [in his *Unpublished Essay on the Doctrine of the Trinity*] wrote that [in a perfect economy] the price is always equal to the gift. In our salvation, the price was [the life of] Christ; the gift is the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the two must be equal in their value, in their essence. They are both fully God.

- Then, in Verse 39, Peter proclaims, ‘For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.’
 - The first question this Verse raises is, ‘What is the **promise**?’
 - It seems quite clear that the promise is, in this context, the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - This is fully consistent with what Peter stated earlier in his sermon (Acts 2:33: ‘Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the **promise** of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.’)

Isaiah 57:15-19:

For thus says the high and exalted One
 Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,
 ‘I dwell on a high and holy place,
 And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit
 In order to revive the spirit of the lowly
 And to revive the heart of the contrite.
 ‘For I will not contend forever,
 Nor will I always be angry;
 For the spirit would grow faint before Me,
 And the breath of those whom I have made.
 ‘Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry and struck him;
 I hid My face and was angry,
 And he went on turning away, in the way of his heart.
 ‘I have seen his ways, but I will heal him;
 I will lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners,
 Creating the praise of the lips
 Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near,’
 Says the LORD, ‘and I will heal him.’

Joel 2:32:

And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD
 Will be delivered;
 For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
 There will be those who escape,
 As the LORD has said,
 Even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

‘The promise...was for them also (who were listening to Peter), and for their children (of the next and subsequent generations), and for all who were far off (certainly the Jews of the dispersion and perhaps also prophetically the distant Gentile world), indeed *for all* (without exception) *whom the Lord our God will call*. Everyone God calls to himself through Christ receives both gifts [forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit]. The gifts of God are coextensive with the call of God.’ John Stott

- Many of our like-minded brethren within the Reformed [Covenantal] community use Acts 2:39 as a text to support paedo, or infant baptism.

‘...in Acts 2:39 Peter proclaims that the promise of the new covenant is ‘for you and for your children.’ That is Old Testament covenantal language. To a first-century Jew that language would indicate that, just as God included Abraham’s children in covenant with him, so God includes the children of believers in the new covenant.’ John Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the LORD*

- Frame is most certainly correct that this is Old Testament covenantal language.

‘I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you’
Genesis 17:7

However, there is something **new**, something **different** about this language, in this context, compared to Old Testament covenantal language.

- In this context, Peter states, ‘the promise is for you and your children **and** for all who are far off...’
 - The first aspect of this Verse that one must understand is, again, what is the promise? **The promise is** the Holy Spirit, the indwelling of God Himself...**salvation**.
 - Secondly, one should observe that the promise is **for** you [that is, those listening to Peter’s sermon, the present generation], your children [future generations], and ‘all who are far off’ [the Gentiles].
 - Finally, Peter makes this even clearer with the apposition, ‘...you, and your children and for all who are far off, **as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.**’

In other words, the promise is for all those whom the Lord our God will effectually call to Himself through Christ.

Furthermore, those who make up this Body will include, ‘you, and your children and for all who are far off.’ The Body of Christ includes those Jews who were present at Pentecost, descendants of those Jews who were at Pentecost, and the Gentile world.

- Peter’s words provide a similar message with what the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 10:12-13:

‘For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for ‘**WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.**’ Romans 10:12-13

- Luke continues his account by noting that Peter preached words not recorded here, but also said to the Jewish crowd, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’ (Verse 40)
 - In Luke 9:41, Jesus said, ‘You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you?’ In Luke 11:29, He continues, ‘This generation is a wicked generation...’
 - Peter’s words echo Jesus’: this is a perverted generation. However, as Peter states, even in this perverted generation, **there is a believing remnant**, and all those who call upon the Name of the LORD will be saved [from this crooked and depraved generation].
- Following Peter’s sermon, ‘those who had received his word were baptized...’
 - Luke states that following this first sermon, ‘about three thousand souls’ were added to the 120.

III. The Gospel Unites

- As new believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, this young Messianic community shared a common salvation which united them in an even greater manner than their Jewish heritage.
- As one changes his or her allegiance from the world to Christ, so his or her commitment to the corrupt and dying world shifts to the community of Christ, that is the church.
- Luke mentions at least three characteristics that united the new Messianic community:

<h4>1. A Sense of Awe</h4>

- Those who have the greatest understanding concerning the *gravity* of their sin always have the greatest understanding of the grace of mercy of God – leaving them in a sense of awe [Recall [Isaiah 6](#)].
- It was not different for these early converts. They knew their sin. They knew what they did. They knew what they deserved. Yet, they knew what they had – a relationship with the One true God through Jesus Christ [whom they had crucified].
- Without an understanding of sin and its just penalty and consequences, the Gospel message is stripped of its true meaning and power. Yet, these people knew the power of the Gospel, for they were keenly aware of the sin for which they were forgiven.

2. Devotion to teaching

- ❑ This is the first, and certainly most foundational unifying principle of the early Church.
- ❑ Luke states that ‘they were *continually* devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching...’
- ❑ There is no question that the ‘substance’ of this teaching was what Jesus Himself taught the disciples. The apostles’ teaching is nothing less than the inspired Words of God Himself – our Scriptures today.
- ❑ The fact that the early Church devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching reflects obedience, on the part of the apostles, to the Great Commission:

‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. God therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching** them to observe all that I commanded you...’
Matthew 28:18-20

This also reflects the urgings of Jude in [Jude 1:3](#): ‘Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.’

- ❑ Even though the early Church witnessed many miraculous signs and wonders, they remained devoted to the teachings of the apostles.
- ❑ Likewise, as healthy New Testament church always grounds its [ever-changing] experiences in the [never-changing] objective truth of God’s Word.

3. Fellowship together

- ❑ The early Church fellowshiped together. They did so because of their common salvation.
- ❑ But, notice, true fellowship can never be divorced from sound teaching. Luke states that ‘they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship...’
- ❑ Another interesting point, though, is **how Luke defines fellowship**.
- ❑ As with Verse 39, Luke uses an apposition here, to explain **what he means by fellowship**.
- ❑ He states, teaching and fellowship, **to the breaking of bread and to prayer**.
 - In other words, fellowship *is* ‘the breaking of bread and prayer...’

- The phrase the ‘breaking of bread’ probably means more than simply sharing a meal together. It is likely that this also included the regular observance of the Lord’s Supper or Communion.
- ❖ So united was the Early Church that they ‘held all things in common; and began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.’
 - ❖ This was the mark of the early Church: sacrificial love for one another.
 - Some have suggested that this is Communism. However, it is most certainly NOT. Communism is forced sharing by a higher authority, such as the state and is based upon the belief that no one has the right to own anything.
 - However, this was voluntary sharing and cooperation out of love for God and each other.
 - ❖ Their unity had nothing to do with socio-economic class, for they were ALL believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, such economic boundaries were all but eliminated as they shared their goods so that no one, in the believing community, was in need.
 - This was consistent with the Old Testament Law (Deuteronomy 15:4).
 - Imagine what an example it would be to the world if there were no one in the church who was in need – if we took care of our own.
 - ❖ They continued ‘in one mind’ day by day. This verbiage echoes the unity among the 120 just prior to Pentecost [‘These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer...’ Acts 1:14].
 - ❖ Again, the unity was NOT based upon temporary things [such as job, education, economics, etc.].
 - ❖ Because of their genuine love for one another and, primarily, for God Himself, the early Church was also marked with ‘gladness and sincerity of heart.’
 - ❖ The reason for this, I believe, is because, once again, their gladness and sincerity resulted for incredible humility, as they understood the unmerited favor of God.
 - ❖ At the beginning of Verse 47, it says that the early church was ‘praising God.’
 - When we know our sin and know our God and the grace that saved us, praising God is always the result. This especially occurs when we gather together with fellow believers and are united, not in the temporary things of life, but in our mutual love and passion to know God.

- ❖ Finally, Luke states that they had ‘favor with all the people...and the Lord was adding tot their number day by day those who were being saved’ [Verse 47].
 - The church was so radically different from the world, so united, that the world noticed.
 - Just like Jesus, this church was growing in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52).
 - However, also like Jesus, this would change, and the remainder of Acts will tell this story.