

UNITED

Acts 2:41-47

In the church, our unity is based on all of us being in Christ and that Christ is not divided. We need to be saying what He says and not our own imaginations. The mind of Christ, if allowed to operate, will cause us to be united in what drives or motivates us. This is also what unifies us in our interpretations of what is happening in our own lives as well as the world around us.

The first century church was birthed and empowered with the coming of the Holy Spirit as the “Promise of the Father.” This event caused the Jews living in Judea and those who were visiting because of the celebration of Pentecost to wonder what was happening. Peter was used by God to proclaim a message that Jesus whom the Jews had rejected was confirmed to be Lord and the promised Messiah. In other words, the Kingdom of Heaven (of which John the Baptist preached was nearly come) had arrived.

Disciplined – 2:41-42 (ESV)

⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2:41–42

This message brought conviction to many of those Jews who heard it and about three thousand of them changed the direction of their lives so that they were motivated to seek to live in this Kingdom and be aligned with Godly righteousness. They gave testimony to this change by being baptized. They identified with and became followers of the Way that Jesus had proclaimed and lived out and for which He died.

Jesus had declared to the people in His sermons to have the Kingdom of God as their top priority. He said, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.” Whatever is our perception of the desired destiny, it impacts our life values which eventually (or ultimately) form our beliefs. The sequence is destiny, values, habits, actions, words, thoughts, and beliefs. As an aside, it is most important to start with the right destiny as the objective rather than starting with preconceived beliefs that may lead to a wrong outcome.

We see elements of the Great Commission being carried out immediately after the coming of the Holy Spirit. The process was to begin in Jerusalem and that happened. Many candidates for developing into disciples had become available in that those who believed received the gift of the Holy Spirit which resulted in a spiritual birth. The Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom and only those who possess spiritual life can perceive its reality.

The process of transforming these new believers into disciples was initiated as the apostles taught them. We recall that Jesus had told His disciples to immerse believers in the character of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit by teaching new believers as Jesus had taught them.

Let’s explore the idea of immersion in the character of the Triune God. An essential part of the immersion process is effective teaching. For teaching to be effective, the learners must be engaged, devoted, or personally involved with wanting to learn so that the principles being taught can be applied to everyday life situations. If we view the things we learn as just a group of facts or even clever ideas and ideals, and fail to digest what we consume, then the words (ideas, etc.) do not get incorporated into our very being and the process is aptly described as “in one ear and out the other.”

Apparently, another important component of immersion is the idea of continual exposure

rather than just infrequent involvement. The closest idea of continual exposure for the Jews prior to this time was that parents were to use everyday opportunities to teach their children the way of the Lord. We see this in Deuteronomy 6.

“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deut 6:7-9)

The way this frequent exposure was accomplished in the early church in Jerusalem was daily fellowship, meals and praying with other believers in addition to the teaching they received from the apostles. What are the benefits that come from frequently gathering together with people who have interests and goals that are aligned with what we believe are important aspects of our lives? One of the more obvious positive aspects is that we can encourage one another and we can share how to address and (hopefully) overcome problems that we might be facing. If all who come together for fellowship are devoted, then being around such people will help us focus on what is really important in moving us toward our destination which is to be transformed in our thinking to be aligned with the principles of the Kingdom of Heaven. There is also benefit to our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health by having a place that is not as stressful as the kingdom of this world can be with all the competitiveness, and faulty world views and challenges that are so common in that environment.

Another important aspect is that we can help each other. Not everyone has the same abilities and capabilities. God has chosen to gift each of us in varying ways so that we can work together for the benefit of all. When we use the gifts that God has given us, then we glorify Him by living each day in submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ and by using the spiritual gifts that He has given to us to extend His kingdom. The context for exercising these gifts is in the local church, where each member works for the growth of the body, to build itself in love. We can make the argument that coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together leads to success. The recurring word that we see is “together.” Being “together” would be like saying that everyone is on the same page or that we are unified.

It is fairly clear that (today) we would see ourselves as being in the category of those who are nominally and practically Christian and that we are making efforts to strengthen and deepen our faith and abilities. While we would get general agreement that this is a good thing, we need to ask “how should our improved faith and ability be used within the context of God’s purpose for the church?” An obvious answer would be so that we can be effectively used to expand the “extent” of the kingdom so that the prayer that Jesus taught of “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” can become a practical reality.

Some have suggested that the terminology “breaking of bread” was meant to describe an observation of the Lord’s Supper that was done by these early Christians in conjunction with the evening meal. That would imply that they took the words of Christ in Luke 22:19 after He had broken the bread “do this in remembrance of Me” and put a literal interpretation on these words. It would not be surprising to see such an expression of their devotion and enthusiasm. Wouldn’t it be good if we let the simple, everyday activities of life remind us of our salvation and cause us to be thankful for all that God has done for us?

Prayer was a natural part of their lives and provided an opportunity for close spiritual fellowship or communion with God. They had opportunities to learn from the apostles, to fellowship with each other, to gain physical nourishment from the shared meals with other Christians and to experience a corporate worship experience in observance of the Lord’s Supper. Prayer was an opportunity to experience these same things in a one-to-one encounter with God.

As they would commune with God during their prayer time, they could experience revelation from God regarding the truths that had been taught by the apostles. They would be strengthened through the fellowship with God during prayer and these encounters would be spiritual nourishment for them as they matured spiritually. The time of prayer would allow them to experience a deeper worship and renewal of their devotion than what might happen in a corporate worship observance.

Unified – 2:43-45

⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. Acts 2:43–45 (ESV)

They grew as others joined them and found their needs being met in miraculous ways. They knew they were living in the presence of God. The sick and lame were healed, evil spirits were cast out, the dead were brought back to life. These wonders and signs were evidences of the “gifts of the Spirit” that Paul wrote about in his letter to the church at Corinth several decades later. Jesus had told the apostles that they would receive power with the coming of the Holy Spirit and this power was demonstrated as Christians simply believed and stepped out in faith to exercise the gifts that God had provided.

Just as we should examine what we do in light of the objectives and goals of what we are trying to accomplish, we should apply the same examination to what God was doing through these early Christians in the church. Since His purpose for the church was and is to extend His kingdom, then we could ask if those “signs and wonders” were beneficial to accomplishing that objective? An honest appraisal would be that these signs and wonders were effective as they helped people realize that “what was happening” was of divine origin and that it was not something that could be done just by human efforts.

Are there any obvious conclusions that we could draw from the lack of effective expansion of the kingdom and the absence of the operation of Spiritual gifts in and through the church today? If the current objectives for our churches are to build buildings, hire staff and present a program and community opportunities throughout each week, then we probably don’t need wonders and signs to get that done.

In Community – 2:46-47

⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:46–47 (ESV)

The early church was also a sharing and caring community where the grace of God was expressed in generosity one to another. Many times in trying to analyze what was happening in this area, some will argue that this was done out of necessity since those who became part of this group (the church) likely lost their jobs and were being persecuted by other Jews. The implication of that argument would be that if such hardships and persecutions were not present, then sharing and generosity would not be needed as much. The problem with that argument is that we see in the first part of verse 47 that the initial response of the Jewish community to this group of Christ followers was that they had “found favor” with all the people. Persecution came later. The motivation was not so much a response to oppression but was coming from genuine care for those in need.

When Jesus taught during His earthly ministry He made a conscious effort to get people to start seeing spiritual realities and not just focus on the physical world that tends to demand our

attention. Most people still are greatly influenced by physical world realities rather than spiritual world realities when priorities are determined. Clearly, these early believers had reevaluated their priorities and focused them on what would help accomplish the objectives of the church. That resulted in doing what was necessary with the resources that God had provided for them to extend the kingdom. So why don't we see such prioritization among church members today? Could it be that resources that are given wind up in efforts that are not focused on the objectives that God has set for His church?

There is no evidence that the early church ever had a door-to-door visitation and shared the good news with people in Jerusalem. Their testimony started with the change in their individual lives and the demonstrated power of the Holy Spirit working through them in the context of the church. Apparently, this was enough to attract people who would ask the same question the three thousand had asked on the day of Pentecost: "What shall we do?" The answer was fairly simple, and had not changed since when they first heard it. Repent and immerse yourself in the character and nature of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Those who acted in faith to accept the truth of the good news of salvation through the work of Christ on the cross were described as "those who were being saved." This should remind all of us that we are all a work in progress and that being born of the Spirit and being justified by grace through faith is the initial part of the process by which God is using all things in life to transform us into the image of Christ Who is the express image of God.