

## The Early Days of the Church

### Acts 2:42-47

Elder Matt Jordan

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

As Primitive Baptists, we believe the only rule of faith and practice is the Word of God, the Old and New Testament Scriptures. We believe the New Testament in particular provides the pattern by which the Church is to function. Because of this firm belief, Primitive Baptists maintain and enjoy a simple form of worship. In this simplicity can be found a purity; a refreshing purity that is not choked by the inventions of men nor the additions of the world. Such inventions and additions have plagued the Church for centuries and have been the source of much strife and division. Certainly it should be the desire of the Lord’s people to maintain the purity of the Church today, believing that this manner of worship is acceptable unto God. Where else should we look but in God’s recorded history of the early days of the Church for the purest and simplest example by which to follow?

In this passage from the Acts of the Apostles, we see the manner in which the Church functioned soon after the day of Pentecost and how the disciples of Christ conducted themselves. We are able to see the activities they were involved in. We can see the display of their attitude and spirit. We see their commitment not only to the Lord but to one another as well. These early believers were unified in purpose and served the Lord with gladness in their hearts. In the infant stage of the Church, we observe the following elements: the proclamation of the gospel, obedience to the gospel, instruction through the gospel, fellowship in the gospel, and sacrifice for the sake of the gospel. These elements often follow one after another and as they do, an obvious pattern develops. It should be our desire that this same pattern continue in the Church today. If we try to follow this pattern today, can we expect the same manner of blessings that the early Church enjoyed? Most would say that 3000 converted in one day may be more than we should expect, but should we not expect the Lord to continue to add to His Church such as should be saved? I believe we should look for that very thing! However, we must also ask the question: why *would* we expect the Lord to add to the Church if the pattern is not being followed; if the Church is not unified, not in peace, not committed to Him, not ministering to the saints, not serving with gladness? A very sobering question!

The worship of God is the primary purpose and most important activity in which the Church was, is, or ever will be involved. If a Church ever loses sight of the purpose for which it was established in this world, it has lost sight of the Lord Jesus Himself, and it has left its first love, as did the Church at Ephesus. At the same time, if a Church feels there is only an occasional opportunity for it to worship and serve God, and that being in the public worship service, it is missing out on some wonderful opportunities and blessings. If a Church meets for worship on a regular basis, that is good. But if a Church is actively ministering to those around her, it is fulfilling its purpose of being a light in the community, as a city set on a hill, all to the glory of God. This is even better.

Believers in the early Church possessed certain characteristics that moved them into other activities beyond the public worship service. These activities manifested their love for the Lord Jesus Christ and for each other. They not only preached Christ and Him crucified publicly, but they put into practice publicly and privately those things that were

preached. Some of the characteristics and activities of the early believers included hospitality (Rom.12:13, 1Tim.5:10), sharing of their material goods (Acts 2:44, Acts 4:34, Rom.15:26), distributing to the necessity of the saints (Acts 11:29, 2Cor.8:1, 2Cor.9:1), supplying the needs of other saints (Phil.2:4, 1Cor.16:1), praying together (Acts 1:14, Acts 12:5), and studying the Scriptures together (Acts 5:42, 17:11, 20:20). In all of these things, the ultimate purpose was to glorify God. So, too, it should be with us today, that we be engaged in such activities if we claim to be the New Testament Church.

In the passage of Scripture under consideration, notice the phrase “continued steadfastly” in verse 42. This phrase has a much stronger definition than it might appear on the surface. If we “continue steadfastly” in something, we are in earnest; we are constantly diligent. The early disciples were described as being ‘continually steadfast’ in three things: in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers. This phrase actually has two applications, both of which should apply to us today. Or, another way of saying it is this: this phrase was used to describe the early disciples because of their commitment in two areas. One area had to do with the ‘place’. They did not neglect the ‘place’ that was set aside for the sake of the doctrine and fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. The way they did not neglect the place was to physically be there, to show up at the appointed time! Not only were the disciples “together” in mind and spirit, they were physically present “together”. They were diligently committed to the assembling of the saints regardless of the occasion. The phrase literally means ‘to attend to all the services’ connected with the commitment they had made. The second way in which the phrase “continued steadfastly” is applied has to do with the ‘object’ of their commitment, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. The application is this: As disciples of Jesus Christ, we show our commitment by dedicating ourselves to Him. By dedicating ourselves, we mean “conforming our lives” to be more like Him. In this, we commit ourselves to learning more about Jesus Christ (doctrine) and seeking opportunities to put into practice what we have been taught (fellowship). We stand firm on the foundation of the gospel, and we commemorate the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (breaking of bread). We commit ourselves diligently to seeking the will of God (prayers). And we commit ourselves to the appointed time and place of assembly where we learn more about Christ and our Father.

As we examine this passage of Scripture and look to God’s word for guidance and instruction, let us also examine our own personal dedication, and that of our churches. As a minister, I need to examine my own commitment. As a pastor, I need to encourage the flock to examine themselves on a personal basis, and ask God for enabling wisdom to instruct the flock. As children of God, we need to continually ask if we are growing not only in our knowledge but in our dedication as well; a dedication to follow the pattern for the New Testament Church as it is laid out in Scripture. If God blesses us to do these things, perhaps He will see fit to send renewal and revival and add to His Church, all to His glory and praise.