

THE ONCE AND FUTURE CHURCH

#4: Right the First Time

February 18-20, 2006

⁴¹Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. *Acts 2:41-47 TNIV*

Introduction: Mission drift is inevitable in any human grouping, and every human institution must be reformed continually. In the Church of Jesus Christ, we are able to say beyond a doubt that God got it right the first time, so reforming the church means returning to Biblical values in every generation. Fortunately, Acts 2:41-47 offers us an amazingly concise snapshot of the early church.

- I. Committed to the Teaching of God's Word
 - A. The Apostles (first Elders/Pastors) were set aside to teach God's Word to God's people.
 - B. The believers were devoted to the teaching of God's Word first and foremost.
 - C. As a result, the believers were "filled with awe" for the God and His mission in the world.
- II. Committed to Fellowship
 - A. United in mission and purpose, the believers were devoted to authentic community.
 - B. All the believers were "together" (in close proximity and unified in mission and purpose).
 - C. Togetherness was an everyday commitment.
 - D. The believers ate together regularly "with glad and generous hearts."
- III. Committed to Worship

- A. The believers continued to worship in the temple regularly.
 - B. They celebrated the Lord's Supper often.
 - C. Their primary purpose in life was to praise God!
- IV. Committed to Ministry
 - A. The believers were devoted to prayer.
 - B. The believers gave whatever was needed to accomplish their mission.
 - C. The believers cared for one another in visible ways.
 - D. Like the Apostles, the believers used their spiritual gifts in ministry, as the remainder of Acts tells us (and the New Testament).
 - E. The first believers were unfailing witnesses of Christ's transforming love.

Conclusion: The first believers successfully built their church a foundation of enduring values that still guide us today. It is interesting to note that they were so successful that they "enjoyed the favor of all the people," believers and unbelievers alike. This might explain why "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" and the church grew exponentially. At the turn of the Second Century, the church father Tertullian was thus able to say, "Christianity spread because the Christians outlived, outloved, and outdied the pagans." So must we!

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