

INTRODUCTION

What happens when 3000 people are converted in a single day? What happens when the Holy Spirit is at work? The answer is found in this little section that we are looking at today. The converts devote themselves to certain things. We have here a brief cameo of life in the very early church, what was it like to belong to that church?

Well it was a church committed to spiritual duties, it displayed spiritual attitudes and it made a great impact in its community. We will only have the time today to look at the spiritual duties of the early church.

1. COMMITTED TO SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES (v 42)

The life of this church was defined by the devotion of its members to spiritual duties and the key to any successful church is to have its membership committed to the same things that this early church was committed to.

a) It Was a Saved Church - The 3000 who confessed faith in Jesus Christ and were baptised (v 41) are the same ones who devote themselves to these spiritual duties. They expressed their faith through their devotion to certain things, the duties that are mentioned here. They were people who wanted to listen to teaching, and share fellowship with others and break bread with their fellow Christians and pray with other Christians because they were saved.

Now it should go without saying therefore that a true church that is committed to fulfilling its spiritual duties will be composed of people who have been saved by the grace of God and are baptised on profession of their faith.

Now I shouldn't have to say that but in the world in which we live we need to say it again and again even in Evangelical churches like our own we need to be reminded of this very simple but important truth. This is because sadly many churches today are made up of unsaved people, religious people, often good people but people who have never been converted and therefore are self focused rather than God focused.

Such churches are not churches at all according to the Scriptures. What this means for us is that there could be people here who come every week and you might even think that you belong to this church, you might even call it your church but in truth you do not belong to this church. We are glad to see you and are glad that you have come to hear God's word but in reality you do not belong to us because you cannot until you are saved, until you are converted and consequently baptised on profession of your faith and in membership with us.

It could be that you are saved but in reality you do not belong to us as a local church. You might belong to God's universal church but you do not belong to this local expression of God's universal because this passage shows that to truly belong to a church means being baptised and being devoted to fulfilling spiritual duties.

That in reality means being in membership with us for membership involves certain commitments from you and from the church. Coming occasionally or even regularly without being committed to this church means that you do not belong to us. O you might be saved but you do not belong to a local group of believing people until you are prepared to be committed to fulfilling your spiritual duties in a local church.

We also need to remember from this passage that although it is good to welcome unbelieving people into our building and services in reality such people will not and should not feel at home with us because they do not belong to us, because they are outside of Christ. I know some churches seem to go to great lengths to make unbelievers feel at home, they want them to feel comfortable while in church. They do not want them to feel out of it in any way.

But surely unbelieving people should feel out of it, they are out of it, they are unbelievers and there is nothing wrong with them feeling uncomfortable. That is how they should feel because God's church is a saved church. Do you feel out of it in the church, do you feel at the edge of everything that goes on? Could it be that you feel like that because you are not yet saved, you have never been converted?

Then turn to Jesus Christ and be saved.

Express that confession of faith through baptism and then join this local church through being a member with us.

b) It Was a Teachable Church - Once these new believers had trusted Christ and obeyed Him in baptism they wanted to come together and learn from Christ by discovering what Christ's apostles taught. They needed to know what the apostles whose teaching was the foundation on which the church is built actually said and taught. Now a commitment to the apostles teaching is foundational to the growth and spiritual health of every church. Once the teaching of God's word is neglected either by the leaders or members of a church then the church is in serious danger. Right throughout the New Testament the priority for every believer and the priority of every church is to hear God's word and to follow it.

Now the early church could actually hear what the apostles taught for themselves whereas we have it recorded for us in the bible but our commitment to it must be the same as the early church who devoted themselves to it. They wanted to learn and they wanted to know how they were to live as individual Christians in their families and in their places of work and in their society.

They wanted to learn how to function as a church. Remember church was new to them, what were they to do? What duties must they carry out? What are they to be devoted to and how are they to function as a church? What leaders should they choose? What should they believe and how should they behave when they are together, as a church and what ought they to be doing together?

Surely all these and many more questions were on their minds and the only way they would know the answers to these questions was to be devoted to the apostles teaching. We likewise get all our answers to the questions that we have from God word and in the same way we, as a church must be devoted to the apostles teaching.

This means in practise that the preaching of God's word must be high on our list of priorities both as a church and as individuals. Preaching must be at the centre of all we do here in the church and each one of us who are members in this church must be committed to and devoted to the preaching of God's word.

That will be reflected in our attendance at the meetings where God's word is preached but it will also be reflected in our attitude when God's word is being taught. We will come with a teachable spirit with an eagerness to learn and mature in our faith through the teaching and preaching of God's word.

Now there can be a danger for those of us who have been Christians for a few years and have heard God's word consistently taught to become complacent about the teaching of God's word. We can become so complacent that we no longer have a teachable spirit or a right attitude and therefore we get very little from God's word either when we read it personally or when we hear it

taught or preached. We must all be careful to guard our heart attitudes when it comes to God's word for the early church was a teachable church.

Do you remember when you first became a Christian and the enthusiasm that you showed for the bible? You couldn't get enough of it. You read it daily, you attended whatever meeting you could where the word of God was preached and you were so excited about it. But now years later your personal bible reading no longer excites you in fact if we were honest it is duty rather than a delight.

You no longer greet the preaching of God's word with enthusiasm but with indifference so that it no longer bothers you if you miss a meeting where preaching is taking place. You remember the days when you looked forward to Sunday's to hear God's word but now you come to church out of other people's expectations rather than your own.

The result is that you get nothing from the preaching or from your own private devotions and you cease to even expect to get anything from it. Your teachable spirit has gone and has been replaced with cynicism. So let us all be careful with our attitude and let us all be committed to the apostles teaching but let us examine our own attitudes so that we have a teachable spirit and an expectant heart.

c) It Was A Fellowshiping Church - Fellowship means sharing with each other in order to stimulate one another to holiness and faithfulness. Fellowship involves having something in common and true fellowship is only possible between Christians because it involves and stems from having fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.

The basic meaning of the word is "partnership" or "sharing" and it is a communal word, you cannot fellowship with oneself. Now fellowship occurs when Christians meet together because we share with one another, by meeting together. We are displaying our partnership with one another we belong together. Once again we see that the Christian life cannot be and is not meant to be lived in isolation.

We need fellowship but for fellowship to happen we must be committed to it. The only thing that stops it taking place is our withdrawal from the church or Christian people. When that happens then it is normally the result of sin because as we see here when the Spirit is at work in people's lives then the result is a commitment to fellowship. Sin obviously hinders the work of the Spirit so if we find ourselves being less interested in meeting with God's people then we ought to look for sin in our lives.

Fellowship in the New Testament involved sharing one's life with your fellow Christians, which from time to time meant sharing one's possessions (v 44). Now we will deal with this verse next time but for now I want us to consider the thought that fellowship involves sharing our lives with others. We in Britain are not always good at this. We are reserved by nature and often like our own company and like to keep things private.

Now of course there are things that will remain private and should be private but we also need to learn to share our lives with one another. That means seeing each other on days other than Sundays and it means allowing people to see us on our good days and our bad days.

It involves having open homes so that people can call and share fellowship over a cup of tea and it involves being willing to meet the needs of our fellow Christians from our own resources. We need to get away from the thought that fellowship only takes place in church on a Sunday. It does take place then but it can take anywhere and at anytime when two Christians meet together and share their lives with one another. Of course real fellowship leaves us open for others will see us as we really are.

Our weaknesses will be exposed but real fellowship also takes place in the atmosphere of love therefore to open up our lives to others and to have our weaknesses and sins exposed will actually help us to deal with our weaknesses and failures. Real fellowship will lead us to praising God for our brothers and sisters who help us to overcome our weaknesses. But the key is love.

Many Christians are afraid of sharing their lives with other Christians because they have been hurt from by fellow Christians in the past because they have opened themselves up to people who did not show genuine love to them.

d) It Was an Obedient Church (v 42) - The fellowship of this early church was symbolised by their obedience to their duty to break bread together. It seems clear here that Luke the writer is referring to what we call the Lord's Supper rather than some common meal that the church shared together. It is true that the Lord's Supper in the early church was part of a common meal but I think the commitment that the church had was to the Lord's Supper rather than eating together although they could not do the one without the other.

Now celebrating the Lord's Supper is not optional for Christians it is commanded by the Lord and it is a real expression of our fellowship together. For when we meet around the table of the Lord we come together on common ground, we come again to the foot of the cross and acknowledge that we are all sinners saved by grace as a result of the work of Christ on the cross.

We are all displaying our unity and oneness in Christ and therefore the Lord's Supper does involve us being committed to it and it calls upon us to examine ourselves and to purge any sin that might hinder our relationship with the Lord and with other Christians.

It is always sad when there are professing believers who do not partake in the Lord's Supper. By that I mean Christians who never partake in it. There are professing Christians like that in Britain. They claim to love Christ, they are found every week in church but they never partake of the Lord's Supper. It tends to be those same people who have never been baptised either. I don't understand professing believers who think like that for the bible is clear that when one turns to Christ such people will be baptised, they will join a church and partake in the life of the church, especially in the church meal of the Lord's Supper.

e) It Was A Praying Church (v 42) - Now this early church was eagerly and persistently engaged in the duty of prayer. They knew how vital this duty was for it is through prayer that the sovereign God works. Now sadly prayer is much neglected in the church of Jesus Christ today. Some Christians will go to hear preaching but those same Christians will not go to prayer meetings.

I do not really understand this, but it is true that in most churches the prayer meeting is the worst attended meeting of the church. Perhaps the way prayer meetings were run in the past has put many Christians off coming but in reality a church that is Spirit filled and devoted to the Lord will be devoted to praying together.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the Church in Britain today is down to the prayerlessness of the church, which at the end of the day is simple disobedience to the Lord who commanded us to pray at all times.

Now in the past I would have gone on in my sermon to bemoan the state of our prayer meetings but I am not going to do that because there has been a vast improvement in the attendance and participation of our prayer meetings. Our Sunday morning one would certainly benefit from others making the effort but in general things are better with the prayer life of this church than they have been for many a year.

But let me warn each one of us that it is so easy to slip up in this area especially as the winter approaches. The temptation will be great to sit at home on a Wednesday night in front of a fire rather than having to make a real effort to come along to the prayer meeting. We will be able to justify our actions. We are tired or busy at work or don't feel so well etc.

But please let me encourage each one of us not to give into those temptations but to continue to be devoted to the prayer life of this church. For those who still do not come along to any of our prayer meetings then let me encourage you to do so for you are missed you know. Perhaps you never been before or it's been some years since you last attended a prayer meeting. Well let me encourage you to come, get into the habit of it and you will be blessed in your soul by the spirit of prayer and the genuine concern and fellowship that is expressed. It might mean that you will have to reorganise your life a little or that you have to make an extra sacrifice but it will be worth it.

Now before we bring this sermon to an end let me just say a word about all of these spiritual duties. You cannot separate these duties you cannot be devoted to one and not another. To be devoted means being devoted to them all, for they are all related to one another.

So to be devoted to the apostles teaching will mean being present at the meetings of the church where we are being taught God's word and that will involve being devoted to fellowship, the Lord's Supper and prayer. We cannot pick and choose which one of these we will be devoted to, as if we can be devoted to the Sunday services but not the midweek prayer meeting. To be devoted means be devoted to all these spiritual duties.

Therefore let us renew our devotion to these spiritual disciplines so that we will find ourselves eager to listen to the apostles teaching, eager to experience real fellowship and committed to the Lord's Supper and to praying with our fellow believers in Christ

Amen