

Characteristics of the Early Church Acts 2:42-47

Thesis: To give us a better understanding of the nature of the early church.

Introduction:

If we are going to try and build up the church, then we must know what the church did that led to its growth. When we notice the characteristics of the early church, we are better able to see what we should be doing today in order to further that growth.

I. The early church continued in the apostles' doctrine (2:42-43).

A. To continue in the apostles' doctrine is to say that they did exactly what the apostles instructed them to do.

1. The apostles had authority on this earth.
 - a. Mt. 16:19 (Christ to Peter) - **And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**
 - b. Mt. 28:18-20 (Christ to all the apostles) - **And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. {19} Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, {20} teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**
2. Christ had given this authority to the apostles in that He taught them what they should do.
 - a. The things that they taught were the things of God.
 - b. When we read of "the apostles' doctrine," we are reading of the doctrine of Christ.

B. Notice exactly what they continued to do.

1. Apostles' Doctrine – They did what the apostles commanded them to do because they knew that it was a command from Christ.
2. Fellowship
 - a. To have "fellowship" is to have partnership with one another.
 - b. We have this association or partnership with one another only in Christ.
 - c. **I Jn. 1:6-7 - If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. {7} But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.**
3. Breaking of Bread
 - a. This is a reference to the Lord's Supper, or Communion.
 - b. This is done on the first day of the week.

- c. **Acts 20:7** - Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.
4. Prayers
- a. The church continued in prayers.
 - b. We have many examples throughout the book of Acts where the church was praying.
 - 1) **Acts 4:29** (prayer for boldness) - Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,
 - 2) **Acts 12:5** - Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.
 - c. **I Thes. 5:17** - pray without ceasing,
5. From the context, we also know that they preached Jesus as the Christ.
- a. This is exactly what Peter and the other apostles had done.
 - b. Throughout the book of Acts, we see where the early church preached Christ to others.
 - 1) **Acts 3** – Peter preaches to the crowd at Solomon’s Porch.
 - 2) **Acts 7** – Stephen preaches to those who were about to stone him.
 - 3) **Acts 10** – Peter preaches to the household of Cornelius.
 - c. **I Cor. 2:1-5** - And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. {2} For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. {3} I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. {4} And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, {5} that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

C. The idea is that the church was doing exactly what God wanted them to do.

- 1. Today, if we are going to be a part of the New Testament church, we must do exactly what God wants us to do.
- 2. We can do these exact things; except, of course, for the miracles that were done.
- 3. We can still have this fellowship (partnership), break bread, pray, and preach.
- 4. The only thing that we do that is not specifically mentioned in Acts 2 is sing (singing is mentioned later in Acts and throughout the New Testament).

II. The early church continued in benevolence (2:44-45).

A. Notice how the early church went about helping one another (2:44-45).

1. The early church was willing to sell what they had in order to help those in need.
 - a. Notice that it does not say “all of their possessions and goods.”
 - b. They sold what was necessary for others to have what was needed.
 - c. Remember: many who were there at Pentecost were away from their home; and they would need extra support while they were in Jerusalem.
 - d. Evangelism in the early church was done to help the brethren as they had need (not just anyone off the street).
 - 1) Acts 4:32-37
 - 2) Acts 11:27-30
 - e. It is also important to remember that this was not something that they had to do.
 - 1) Remember Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).
 - 2) Their sin was not that they kept some money for themselves; their sin is that they lied about it.
 - 3) The early church sold what they had because it was their strong desire to fulfill the needs of the saints.
2. The main idea is that they were willing to give up all that they had so that others (their own family in Christ) would not have to go without.
 - a. Today, we have trouble getting others to give up one earthly thing in order to help one another out.
 - b. The early church sold what they had so that others would not have to be without.

B. We are commanded as Christians to help those who are in need.

1. Pr. 3:27-28 - Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. {28} Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,” when you have it with you.
2. We are to help especially those of our family (other Christians).
 - a. Rom. 12:13 - distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.
 - b. Gal. 6:9-10 - And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. {10} Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.
3. Whether it is giving of our possessions or giving encouragement to others, we need to help one another.

III. The early church continued in fellowship (togetherness) (2:46 -47a).

A. Notice the fellowship of the early church.

1. They continued daily with one another.
 - a. They met daily in the temple.
 - b. They wanted to spend time together and looked forward to this time.
 - c. Sometimes, we have trouble getting people to give up one week or night in order to worship God.
2. They ate meals together regularly.
 - a. The indication from the text is that this “breaking bread” was the eating of full meals.
 - b. This was not the Lord’s Supper that was done on the first day of the week.
3. They also praised God regularly.
 - a. When they came together, they would praise God.
 - b. Worship was very important to the early church, and something that they did often.

B. This was extremely valuable time for the early church.

1. Remember some of the problems of the early Christians.
 - a. On many occasions, their very lives were at stake.
 - b. Many Christians were killed because of their belief in Christ.
 - c. They needed this encouragement and fellowship to remain faithful.
2. We need this same kind of encouragement today.
 - a. Our soul is at stake.
 - b. Even though we may not be threatened with death, we still have to remain faithful in order to obtain that home in heaven.
 - c. To see this great need of fellowship and encouragement, notice the example of Elijah.
 - 1) In **I Kgs. 18**, Elijah has defeated the 450 prophets of Baal.
 - 2) However, in **I Kgs. 19**, Elijah is depressed because he feels that he is alone in this world.
 - a) **I Kgs. 19:4** - But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, “It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!”
 - b) **I Kgs. 19:10** - So he said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.”
 - c) Notice God’s response – **I Kgs. 19:18** - “Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

3) Elijah needed this encouragement to continue.

C. One of the main purposes of the church meeting together is to edify (encourage) one another.

1. Rom. 14:19 - Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.
2. I Cor. 14:26 - How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.
3. I Thes. 5:11 - Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.
4. Heb. 10:24-25 - And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, {25} not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.
5. We encourage one another when we meet together and worship the Lord.
6. It is impossible to encourage one another when some refuse to obey God by worshiping with the saints.

Conclusion:

Because of what the early church did, they grew (2:47b).

It was God who added to the church.

Are you a part of the church?