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(Continuation from last week 12/18/13)

# The First Church: Worthy Traits

## THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF THE CHURCH, Acts 2:1-7:60

### The First Church: Worthy Traits, Acts 2:41-47

#### 2. (Acts 2:42) Steadfastness: the early believers were a people who “continued steadfastly” in four things.

Acts 2:42 (NASB)

<sup>42</sup>“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

#### Spiritual Duties

This was really a church, nothing more and nothing less. Its life was completely defined by the devotion to those spiritual duties which make up the unique identity of the church. Nothing outside the living Lord, the Spirit, and the Word define life for the church. This church, though not having any cultural elements of success, no worldly strategies, was still endowed with every necessary component for accomplishing the purposes of its Lord. The church will still be effective in bringing sinners to Christ when it manifests the same key elements of spiritual duty that marked this first fellowship.

#### It Was a Saved Church

Acts 2:42 (NASB)

<sup>42</sup>“**They were continually devoting themselves** to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

The three thousand who confessed faith in Christ and were baptized in verse 41 are the **they** who showed the genuineness of their faith by continuing. Despite the **hate**, **ridicule**, and **persecution** they suffered, they remained faithful. That is a mark of genuine salvation. Jesus said in John 8:31, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.”

The true branch will abide in the vine (John 15:1-4).

John 15:1-4 (NASB)

<sup>1</sup>“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

<sup>2</sup>Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

<sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

<sup>4</sup> Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me.”

The good seed will not wither and die under persecution ([Matthew 13:3-9, 21](#)).

[Matthew 13:3-9 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> “And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, “Behold, the sower went out to sow;

<sup>4</sup> and as he sowed, some *seeds* fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up.

<sup>5</sup> Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil.

<sup>6</sup> “But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.”

<sup>7</sup> Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out.

<sup>8</sup> And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.

<sup>9</sup> He who has ears, let him hear.”

[Matthew 13:21 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> “Yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.”

In contrast, the apostle John writes of false believers, “**They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us**” ([1 John 2:19](#)).

That the church should be composed of saved individuals seems axiomatic. Sadly, however, many churches today are made up largely of unsaved individuals. Amazingly, some even try to design a church where non-Christians can feel comfortable. This can't be the goal in a church *that is devoted to holiness* and **righteousness** in all areas of life. Such a church will be unpopular with sinners. In this first fellowship, all the **professors were possessors**.

That is not to say that unbelievers are not welcome to attend the preaching of the truth and the worship. They are welcome to hear the gospel preached and the Word of God expounded. They are welcome to hear the **prayers of confession, the anthems of praise, and the calls to holiness**. They are welcome to witness the corporate love and devotion of the church to Jesus Christ and the eternal God. All of that should make them uncomfortable with their spiritual condition. Membership and service in the church, however, are restricted to believers.

**God's people and Satan's people** cannot work together to achieve God's goals. **"Do not be bound together with unbelievers,"** Paul warned the Corinthians, **"for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?"** ([2 Corinthians 6:14-15](#)).

Paul commended the Thessalonians in terms that leave no doubt that they were saved:

**1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup>**"Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.**

<sup>2</sup>**We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;**

<sup>3</sup>**constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,**

<sup>4</sup>**knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;**

<sup>5</sup>**for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.**

<sup>6</sup>**You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,**

<sup>7</sup>**so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.**

<sup>8</sup>**For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.**

<sup>9</sup>**For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,**

<sup>10</sup>**and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come."**

In that passage, Paul described the people in the Thessalonian church as in the Father, Christ ([v. 1](#)), and the Holy Spirit ([v. 5](#)). He noted that they possessed the great triad of Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love ([v. 3](#)). He was confident of God's choice of them for salvation ([v. 4](#)). They were imitators of Paul and Christ ([v. 6](#)), so much so that they were an example to the other believers in their region ([vv. 7-9](#)). Clearly it was a congregation of saved people.

Conversely, the Lord Jesus Christ rebuked the **church at Pergamum** for allowing itself to be infiltrated by unbelievers, thus being influenced by Satan:

**Revelation 2:14-16 (NASB)**

<sup>14</sup>**"But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.**

<sup>15</sup> **So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.**

<sup>16</sup> **Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.”**

They had those who compromised with the world, as Balaam and Balak caused Israel to intermingle with Moab. The error of the Nicolaitans apparently involved sexual immorality. Christ’s stern rebuke of them **shows His concern for the purity of the church.**

To fail to exclude unbelievers from the fellowship of the church is a grave error. Only **disunity** and **dissension** can result when those who serve Christ try to work in harmony with those who serve Satan. Additionally, to design the activities of the church to appeal to unbelievers, or to allow them to play a major role in the life of the church, **is to give them a false sense of security.**

The result for them may be eternal tragedy. The church must reach out in love to those who do not know Christ. It must never, however, let them feel that they are a part of the fellowship until they come to faith in Christ. And no evangelistic purpose should ever be undertaken that alters what the church is by divine design—an assembly of saved worshippers pursuing holiness and spiritual service.

The first fellowship passed the initial test of spiritual duty; it encompassed only those who knew and loved Jesus Christ. Luke later points out that while many were drawn by the Lord to salvation, unbelievers were actually afraid to go near the church in Jerusalem because sin was being dealt with so severely ([Acts 5:13-14](#)).

[Acts 5:13-14 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> **“But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.**

<sup>14</sup> **And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to *their number*.”**