

We Believe
We Believe that the Church is God's Idea
Acts 2:37-47

Dr. Steve Horn

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Introduction: We started in this text last week as we talked about baptism, but let's go a little farther today as we think about the church.

Text: **37** Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" **38** Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39** For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." **40** And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." **41** Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*. **42** And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. **43** Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. **44** Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, **45** and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. **46** So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

This has always been a favorite text of mine. I consider it to be among that is most important to me. I literally think about it every day. The text guides us into a discussion on the church.

The Requirement for Membership into a New Testament Church

Some churches require different things to be considered a "member" of the church, but basically there are three New Testament requirements to be a part of a church.

- Belief—You must be a believer in Christ. You must believe the right things about Christ. This whole series, "We Believe" stands on the premise that in order to be a church, several fundamental beliefs must be held. Paul, in speaking to his protégée, Timothy, called the church the "pillar and foundation of truth." (1 Timothy 3:15) So, we must have right beliefs.
- Baptism—Baptism is, as we said last week, the mark, or the identification, that you maintain and agree with the beliefs.
- Belonging—As we read in Act 2, there is such a feeling of wanting to belong. Those early believers could not have thought in terms of just occupying a seat. They wanted to belong to the community of believers. They needed to belong to the community of believers.

Chuck Colson writes in his book, *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe It, and Why it Matters*:

We cannot treat the local church like a restaurant, picking and choosing from the menu, visiting another whenever we feel like it. Church membership involves making a covenant with fellow believers. It takes time to develop unity with others at any depth, and this never takes place, ever—not at any time or anywhere—without conflict.¹

The Commitment of a New Testament Church

Next, we see what the church should do. Here are the priorities of the local church. We are going to be pressed all the time to do so many different things, but here is what we must be committed to doing.

They were continually devoting themselves to...

- Teaching—They wanted to learn all they could.
- Fellowship—They recognized that authentic fellowship would sustain them, but also be contagious as they shared their message with others.
- Worship—We see this in our text by their breaking bread together. In this context, “breaking bread” most likely refers to sharing the LORD’s Supper together as a way of remembering. Worship is remembering what Christ has done for us.
- Prayer—They were devoted to prayer because they believed that something unique happened when people prayed. When the early church had a problem, they didn’t panic, picket, or pout. They prayed. Just one or two pages over in Acts 4, we see a remarkable example of this kind of praying.
- Evangelism—Not necessarily expressed in Acts 2, but the rest of Acts indicates that the Church was devoted to sharing the message of Jesus with others.

The Excitement of a New Testament Church

In our text, verse 43 gives us the indication that fear came upon every soul. A better translation is awe. It was excitement.

Something is happening all weekend that produces great excitement. It’s sporting events. People cheered. They were excited. Why? First, people get excited because they believe in their team. Second, people get excited because they are committed to their team. Third, they believe that their team is going to win or hope they can win. If folks can do that about a football team, should we not be able to do that for our LORD and His church?

¹ Chuck Colson, *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe It, and Why it Matters*, Zondervan, 2008, 155.

Excitement happens when we stand in awe of God. We cannot manufacture excitement. Excitement is contagious. Pray for God to do marvelous works in our midst that we stand in awe.

The Attachment of a New Testament Church

Some might consider this portion (vv. 44-46) of the text difficult to apply in a contemporary setting, but notice the timeless application. At the very least, our fellowship has these obligations:

- Relational
- Financial

In the 1988 Winter Olympics American speed skater Dan Jansen was favored to win a gold medal. The day before his first race, Dan's sister died from leukemia. Bearing the sorrow, Jansen fell in the first turn. Four days later, in the 1,000 meter race, he fell again. Jansen received a lot of mail, but one letter was more than remarkable. The letter came from a 30 year old Special Olympics athlete named Mark from Pennsylvania. Mark wrote:

Dear Dan,
I watched you on TV. I am very sorry you fell two times. I am in the Special Olympics. Seven years ago, right after my Dad died, I won a gold medal in the PA State Special Olympics. Before we start each race, our teachers tell us to say, "Let me win, but if I can't, let be brave in the attempt." I want to share my gold medal with you because I don't like to see you not get one. Try again next time.

Inside the envelope, Dan found the gold medal. That's it. That Attachment! When somebody needs something, we give them, even if it is ours.²

The Assessment of a New Testament Church

How do we know if we are doing any good? The assessment is found in verse 47. There is really no other gauge for a church.

² From Sermon by David Dykes, January 7, 2001, "Back to the B.A.S.I.C.S."