

March 14, 2021
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Acts
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2021 David J. Whitcomb

RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL

Acts 2:37-47

God recorded in a later part of this book we call *Acts* the situation of Paul preaching at a gathering of philosophers in Athens. We read, *So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.” (Acts 17:22-23) And he did.* He spoke about **God the Creator**, **God the Sustainer**, and **God the eternal judge** who will ultimately judge the entire world according to the righteousness of Jesus Christ who He raised from the dead. **That is the gospel, the good news of salvation.**

How did the brilliant people of Athens like that? There was a broad array of responses. # 1 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” 33 So Paul went out from their midst. 34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them. (Acts 17:32-34)

Some people reacted with such disbelief that they resorted to **mockery**, the response of a fool who only thinks he is wise. Some doubted the mighty work of God and offered to listen to the preacher at another time. Whether they were sincere is not ours to say. Then there were those who believed Paul whose names actually show up in the Bible for eternity. That is quite an honor.

But, notice that a clear distinction was drawn based on responses to the good news. We read that when some of the people rejected the gospel, *Paul went out from their midst*. That does not simply mean that the meeting was over and Paul went back to his motel. No, Paul was done with them. He didn't stay and argue with them. He didn't offer to negotiate the offensive part about the resurrection of Christ. He walked away.

Notice also that the few people who did believe, walked away with Paul. The text says, “*they joined him.*”

When God the Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin and regenerates a sinful soul forgiving the penitent's sins, a major change takes place. In response to the miracle of conviction of sin and the miracle of the new birth, the newly born people are going to hang out together. They are going to have much in common. There is going to be corporate fellowship, corporate worship, corporate prayer, corporate praising God, and corporate learning from God's Word. In a word, the positive response to the gospel is unity.

In the story of our text, the initial response to hearing the gospel was conviction of sin, which resulted in faith in God's mighty work and identification with forgiveness of sins. The continuing response was that the forgiven people had a lot in common.

2 I. The Initial Response of Faith (vv.37-41).

The message of the first sermon in the Church was direct, to the point, and often repeated:

✓ A. Repent and be baptized for forgiveness (vv.37-39).

That was Peter's answer to the question conviction caused

....

✓ 1. Conviction causes important questions.

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (v.37).

- a. The listeners asked because they were cut to the heart.
 - 1) That in itself was a miracle.
 - 2) It is the work Jesus promised the Holy Spirit does.

3 “And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” (John 16:8)

- 3) They were convicted of sin as the Holy Spirit used the Word of God (OT)

4 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)

- a) Literally they were “stabbed in the heart.”
- b) That is what the Bible does.

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

- 4) This is the process, the work of God drawing sinners to faith in the Son for redemption.

5 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:44)

- 5) The crowd of people who thought they were devoted to God **were undergoing a miracle of grace from God.**
 - 6) This is what happens, **what must happen whenever a sinner is born again.**
- b. Conviction of sin generates the critical question.

“What shall we do?”

- 1) That is the question **that will, that must be asked when the Holy Spirit convicts of sin.**
- 2) When the sinner finally sees that he or she is an offense to God, they will strongly desire an answer to this question.
- 3) **How does the enemy Satan like that?**
- 4) Satan abhors God’s work of drawing children who deserve wrath out of his kingdom of darkness into the light of truth.

Therefore,

- c. Satan offers a plethora of wrong answers to people who ask, **“What must I do?”**
 - 1) The Jews could have concluded that they didn’t need to do anything because they were born into the “chosen” people.

- a) They were already God's people.
 - b) An amazing number of children born to Gentile Christian parents errantly assume the same thing.
 - c) They wrongly presume they have always been part of the **Church**.
- 2) The **traditionalist** today answers that question by concluding they just need to keep the traditions of the church.
 - 3) The **moralist** is quite sure that he must try to be good and that his good will outweigh the bad in the end.
 - 4) The **legalist** is compelled to be more serious about good works so that God will be required to save him or her.
 - 5) The **universalist** says, **“Don't worry about what you must do. A good God will be sure to save everyone.”**
- d. Peter was preaching truth and could not deviate from the only right answer to the question, **“What must we do?”**

The answer to the question is that . . .

6 2. “Called ones” are baptized.

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the

forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (v.38).

When sinners fall under Holy Spirit conviction, the first thing for them to do is . . .

a. *Repent.*

1) That is the same message John the Baptist came preaching.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:1-2).

2) It is the message Jesus preached in connection with the Kingdom of heaven.

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17)

a) The command most basically means **turn around, change direction.**

b) Throughout Scripture the word requires **turning away from sin, idols, rebellion, toward God.**

c) Repentance is **a change in relationship.**

d) **Turn and stop running from God, turn and stop offending God, turn and find peace with God.**

A second part of Peter’s instruction answered the question, “What must we do?” with the words . . .

b. *Be baptized.*

- 1) The act of repentance, turning from sin to Christ, is **validated, verified, affirmed by public identification with Christ.**
- 2) John practiced the same idea when he publicly baptized people who identified with repentance from sin.
- 3) This would have been a shocking recommendation to the devout Jews.
 - a) Being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ would have seemed an almost impossible thing to do.
 - b) Fifty days earlier the religious and civil authorities had executed Jesus of Nazareth in a gruesome crucifixion.
 - c) **Would they really have to believe what Peter had just preached?**

If they were baptized, they would . . .

- 1] Publicly identify themselves with the truth that **Jesus of Nazareth is God the Son.**
- 2] Publicly identify themselves with the truth that **God affirmed Jesus's deity by many miracles.**
- 3] Publicly identify themselves with the truth that **this Jesus had risen from the**

dead and was in heaven with God the Father whom they claimed to worship.

Frankly, that is beyond the scope of human ability. A miracle had to occur.

- 4) Peter did not teach that forgiveness of sins was the result of the act of baptism.
 - a) Baptism was affirmation that forgiveness had already taken place.
 - b) Similarly: **Good works, like the Christians having all things in common did not save them but was evidence of salvation.**
 - c) The whole story of salvation throughout Scripture proves that ***the sinner is saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ alone — not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9).***
- 5) Repentance, a change of heart, brings forgiveness.
- 6) Baptism is a public declaration of that forgiveness.

Third instruction to answer the question, “What must we do?”

c. ***Receive the Holy Spirit.***

- 1) God gives the Holy Spirit as a ***gift.***
- 2) No one “earns” the Holy Spirit by **repenting** or by **being baptized**, or by **praying diligently.**

3) The same miraculous indwelling by the Holy Spirit, the fruit of which the people observed, was the promise for all who will repent.

d. This is the promise of the gospel.

For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (v.39).

- 1) A promise for everyone, Jew or Gentile, near to God’s law or far from God’s law.
- 2) Holy Spirit indwelling, comforting, teaching, convicting, is the promise for every person who the Lord calls to Himself.
- 3) God takes the initiative to call the sinner.
- 4) The Holy Spirit convicts the sinner of sin.
- 5) The sinner by the gift of faith cries out for God’s mercy, confesses sin, repents and is forgiven.
- 6) At that moment the new born saint receives the Holy Spirit forever.

Therefore it only makes sense—in human wisdom—for sinners to . . .

7 B. Save yourselves! (vv.40-41).

Why did Peter give that kind of commandt?

We will discover the meaning as we consider Peter’s . . .

✓ **1. Continued teaching.**

And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them (v.40a),

- a. What we read in this text was not the full sermon Peter preached.
- b. He used many other words, probably more Scripture as he *bore witness*.
 - 1) Peter **thoroughly testified**.
 - 2) The word means he was simply doing what Jesus said he would do once he received the Holy Spirit (*“Be My witnesses,” same root word μαρτυρέω 1:8*).
- c. Certainly Peter laid down more arguments as he *continued to exhort*.
 - 1) Calling the sinners alongside the Word of God.
 - 2) Challenging them to repent.

But what about that . . .

✓ 2. Confusing command.

*saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”
41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls (vv.40b-41).*

- a. **How does a sinner save himself?**
 - 1) *Save yourselves* is a **passive voice command**.

- 2) Obviously, the corpus of Scripture agrees and is clear that sinners, being spiritually dead in sin, cannot save themselves.
 - 3) Literally the word means *put yourself in position to be saved*.
 - 4) That is the same as, *“Repent.”*
- c. They did not *add themselves* but *were added* (aorist, passive, indicative)
- 1) Three thousand souls at once is impressive.
 - 2) So the beginning, the birthday, the first day of the Church.

8 II. The Continuing Response of Faith (vv.42-47).

The people who God added through faith demonstrated a

...

✓ **A. Good practice accompanied by signs (vv.42-43).**

✓ **1. They were interested in helpful practices.**

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (v.42).

Four characteristics of people who God has drawn to Christ, who *have repented*, who are identified with Christ, who are *filled with the Holy Spirit*.

- a. *Devoted to the apostles’ teaching.*
 - 1) This is doctrine.

- 2) This is what Jesus had taught them.
- 3) It is the truth that the Holy Spirit continued to unfold to them.
- 4) They had the privilege of unique revelation that we don't have.
- 5) This was a critical part of Christ establishing the Church.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:19-21).

b. *Devoted to fellowship.*

- 1) Again the word *devoted* means to keep on, to persist in.
- 2) The word carries the implication of continuing to do something with intense effort, even in the face of difficulty.
- 3) The antithesis to “devoted” might be seen in how easily modern Christians find it not to fellowship.
- 4) Fellowship is close, mutual association and involvement.
- 5) Fellowship always involves people.

You might have a close affinity for a **hobby**, an **idea**, a **philosophy**, or even an **animal**, **but that is not fellowship**.

6) Fellowship is still two or more FELLOWS in a boat.

c. *Devoted to breaking of bread.*

1) This is observance of the Lord's Supper.

2) Our Lord commanded this practice (it is not optional).

3) Because **it is key to reminding us of the price that Christ paid to redeem us from sin and to Himself.**

d. *Devoted to prayers.*

1) Engaging in prayer with faith believing that God hears and God answers.

2) Fellowship— concern for each other— drives us to pray with intercession.

That is a very good, basic, accurate description of the character of the Church.

Not devoted to programs, or entertainment or social causes.

Devoted to the very things that will encourage each other to have a better understanding of Christ and a closer walk with Him.

✓ **2. They were instruments of awe.**

And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles (v.43).

- a. The wonders and signs were not of their doing.
- b. They were not praying that God would do miracles through them.
- c. They were simply vessels God used to do what He wanted to do.
- d. God's work through us humans should result in glory to Himself.

And a further result of faith in Christ was . . .

9 B. Togetherness (vv.44-47a).

✓ 1. All things corporate.

44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need (vv.44-45).

- a. On one hand, there are no Lone Rangers in God's work.
 - 1) Some of us are introverts by nature.
 - 2) That is a weakness we must work at in order to accomplish the "togetherness" of the Church.
 - 3) IN this chapter about the beginning of the Church, we find they are **described by the word "together" four times** (2:1,6,44,46).
 - 4) In this verse, together seems a bit extreme in that they all *had all things in common*.

b. **Together** is a hallmark of the Church, but at the same time, financial and political communalism doesn't work.

- 1) Communalism is a social organization on a communal basis.
- 2) It is characterized by loyalty to a sociopolitical grouping based on religious or ethnic affiliation.
- 3) That sounds kind of like the Church.
- 4) Yes, but just a few years later in Church history we discover that the saints in the new churches in Asia were sending offerings to the Church in Jerusalem.
- 5) Was it because they liquidated sources of income?
- 6) In Paul's Thessalonian letters Paul **did not recommend communalism** but individual responsibility so that we can care for those who are truly needy.

✓ 2. Praising God.

46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people (vv.46-47).

- a. Attending the temple together.

- 1) Because that was the gathering place for those who loved God.
 - 2) Equivalent to us attending meetings at church buildings.
- b. Breaking bread in their homes.
- 1) Again this refers to the Lord's Supper.
 - 2) They did it in homes because there were no church buildings until the 3rd century.
- c. Receiving food with glad and generous hearts.
- 1) This refers to the love feasts, the fellowship meals.
 - 2) Glad hearts and generous hearts fit with the communal idea of having all things in common.
- d. Praising God.
- e. Viewed favorably.
- 1) This was a miracle from God.
 - 2) In short order, they were not viewed favorably.
- f. This was Christ's blessing and clearly His will in the foundational days of the Church.

It would change within probably less than two years when Saul's ravaging of the Church scattered these believers in every direction (i.e. into Samaria and the rest of the world) (Acts 8:1).

10 C. Witnessing God's blessing (v.47b).

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (v.47b).

✓ **1. People were being saved.**

- a. Still the result of the witnesses proclaiming what they had experienced.
- b. This continued after the sojourners had returned home.

✓ **2. The Lord added.**

- a. **The Lord must add or the addition is not genuine.**
- b. Also very soon it becomes obvious that Satan was planting tares among the wheat.

Conclusion:

The first days of the Church were unique in so many ways.

The coming of the Holy Spirit in a unique way.

The preaching in known foreign languages by pretty ordinary people.

The large number of people God added in one day.

The miracles and signs God gave to confirm His work.

We don't repeat things like that.

But we should be characterized by being devoted to:
teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers

We must engage in the “togetherness” of the Body of Christ.